CHINA REPORT

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INTERNATIONAL

China-US Relations: A shift towards parity on global stage

SPECIAL REPORT

Reinvented Incarnations: How Xizang's living Buddhas serve beyond the monastery

LICENCE TO PILL

China's pharma companies look to global partnerships to innovate novel drugs

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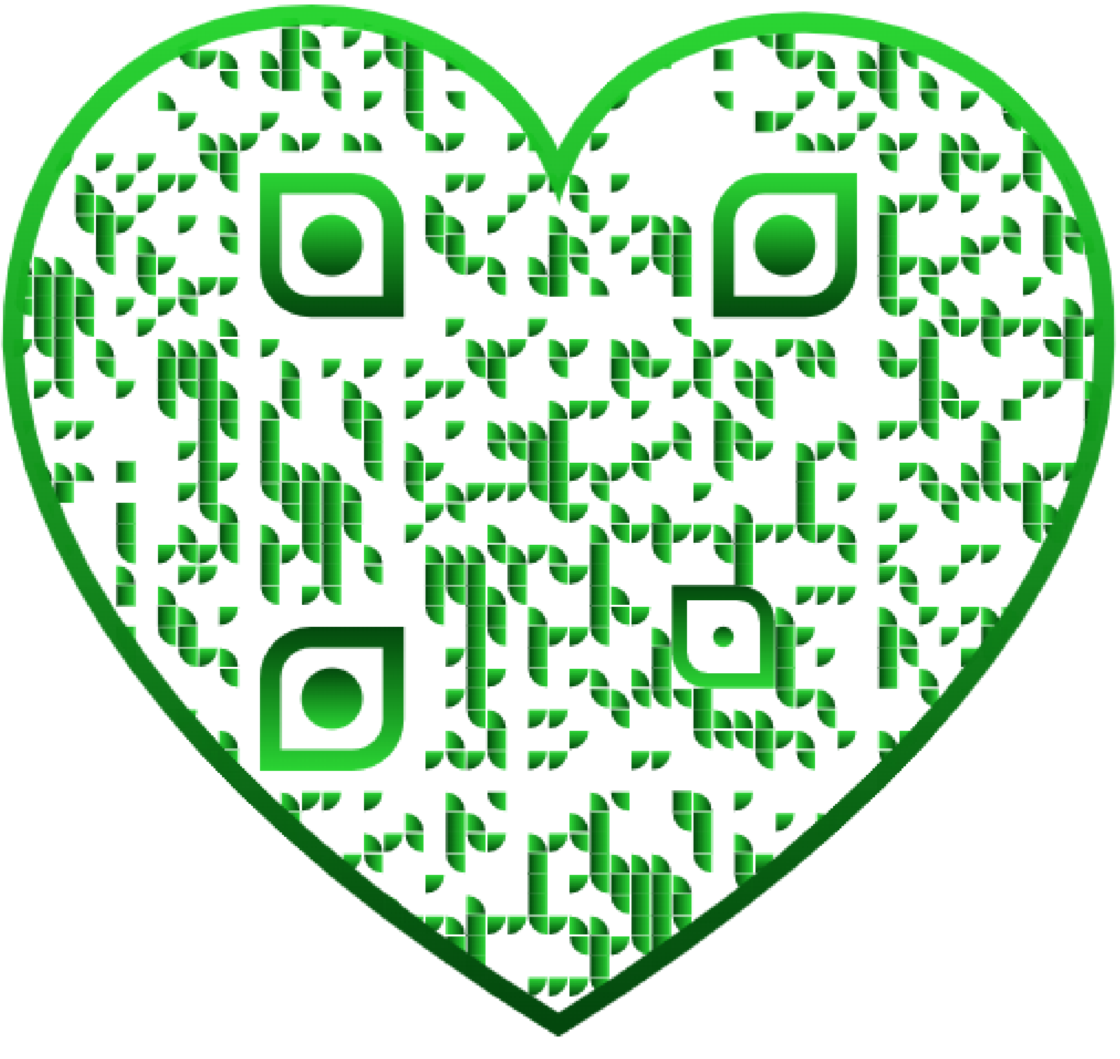

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PERFECTING TRADITION WITH NATURE FOR YOU

China's updated climate targets mark a new chapter in controlling greenhouse gas emissions

In a video address to the United Nations Climate Summit held in New York on September 24, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced that China will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 7-10 percent from peak levels by 2035.

The target is part of China's new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), a climate action plan that all countries subject to the 2015 Paris Agreement must submit to the UN every five years. On the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement, the Climate Summit was a pivotal event for countries to submit their new NDCs.

In 2020, Xi pledged that China's CO2 emissions would peak before 2030 and that the country would achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

> China's CO2 emissions fell 1 percent year-on-year in the first half of 2025, extending the decline that started in March 2024, which has led many analysts to believe that China's CO2 emissions may have already peaked

In addition to overall emissions reductions, Xi announced more pledges, including three quantitative and three qualitative goals. Specifically, China pledged to increase the share of non-fossil fuels in its total energy consumption mix to over 30 percent, expand installed wind and solar power capacity to over six times the 2020 levels to bring the total to 3,600 gigawatts, and to scale up the total forest stock volume to over 24 billion cubic metres.

Meanwhile, China will make new energy vehicles the mainstream in new vehicle sales, expand the National Carbon Emissions Trading Market to cover major high-emission sectors, and establish the fundamentals of a climate adaptive society.

Using the term "greenhouse-gas emissions" rather than CO2 emissions marks the first time China has announced a target that includes other greenhouse gases like methane and nitrous oxide. It is also the first time China announced a new climate target after the 2030 peak carbon aim.

According to data released by Carbon Brief, an international platform for climate science and policy, driven by a rapid growth in solar and wind power, as well as a drop in coal use and an increase in natural gas consumption, China's CO2 emissions fell 1 percent year-on-year in the first half of 2025, extending the decline that started in March 2024, which has led many analysts to believe that China's CO2 emissions may have already peaked.

The Chinese government has already started to lay out the roadmap for its future work on climate. In August, the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council released a guideline on establishing a national emissions trading system (ETS), which indicates a major shift from an intensity-based approach to absolute carbon caps.

China had previously adopted a system of "dual" carbon controls in its climate goals, which meant controlling the carbon intensity per unit of GDP and total carbon emissions. In 2021, China pledged to reduce CO2 emissions per unit of GDP by 65 percent from 2005 levels by 2030.

With the expansion of the national ETS, China is moving towards absolute carbon caps. By 2027, the guideline aims to extend the coverage of the national ETS to cover all major industrial emitters including steel, cement and primary aluminium, three of the heaviest-emitting industries, and to build a cap-and-trade system "with a mix of allocation and auctioning, and a voluntary market that is credible, transparent, widely participatory and aligned with international standards."

China's ongoing work and new commitments to addressing climate change will help reshape its political dynamics and promote global climate governance by encouraging broader and more pragmatic cooperation.★

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Publisher: Simon Harris

Executive Director:
William Ritchie

Editor-in-Chief: Shirong Chen
Managing Editor: David Harris

Editorial Office
Copy Editors: Anna Kerry, Heather Xu
Editors: Rosalind Bay, Sophie Lang
Consultant Editor: Anthony Miles
Addr: 29 Bolina Road, London SE16 3LF
Tel: +44 20 7224 8812
Email: audience@chinareport.co.uk
Website: www.ChinaReport.co.uk

Art Department
Art Director: Mark Moody
Art Editor: Victor Fan

Advertising/Marketing/Subscription
Foremost 4 Media
Duty Editor: Alicia Webber
Email: info@foremost4.media
Tel: +44 20 7224 8812
+44 7947 500129
Website: foremost4.media

Legal Adviser: Martin Wang

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1. Visitors take pictures of *Along the River During the Qingming Festival,* the masterwork by Song Dynasty painter Zhang Zeduan (1085-1145) displayed at the Palace Museum (Forbidden City), Beijing, September 29, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

2. A visually impaired person reads *A Tactile Journey Along the River During the Qingming Festival,* displayed at the campus of Beijing Union University, Beijing, October 13, 2025. The event coincided with International White Cane Safety Day, celebrating the independence and abilities of people who are blind or visually impaired, which falls on October 15 (Photo by VCG)

3. Two foreign tourists visit the Palace Museum in Beijing, October 1, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

4. The *Gold Chalice of Eternal Stability,* from the reign of Qing Dynasty Emperor Qianlong (1736-1795), is exhibited at the Palace Museum, Beijing, September 29, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

5. People visit a tea house in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, October 11, 2025. A former lacquerware factory, the tea house, covering thousands of square metres, blends lacquerware with tea culture, for which the city is famed (Photo by IC)

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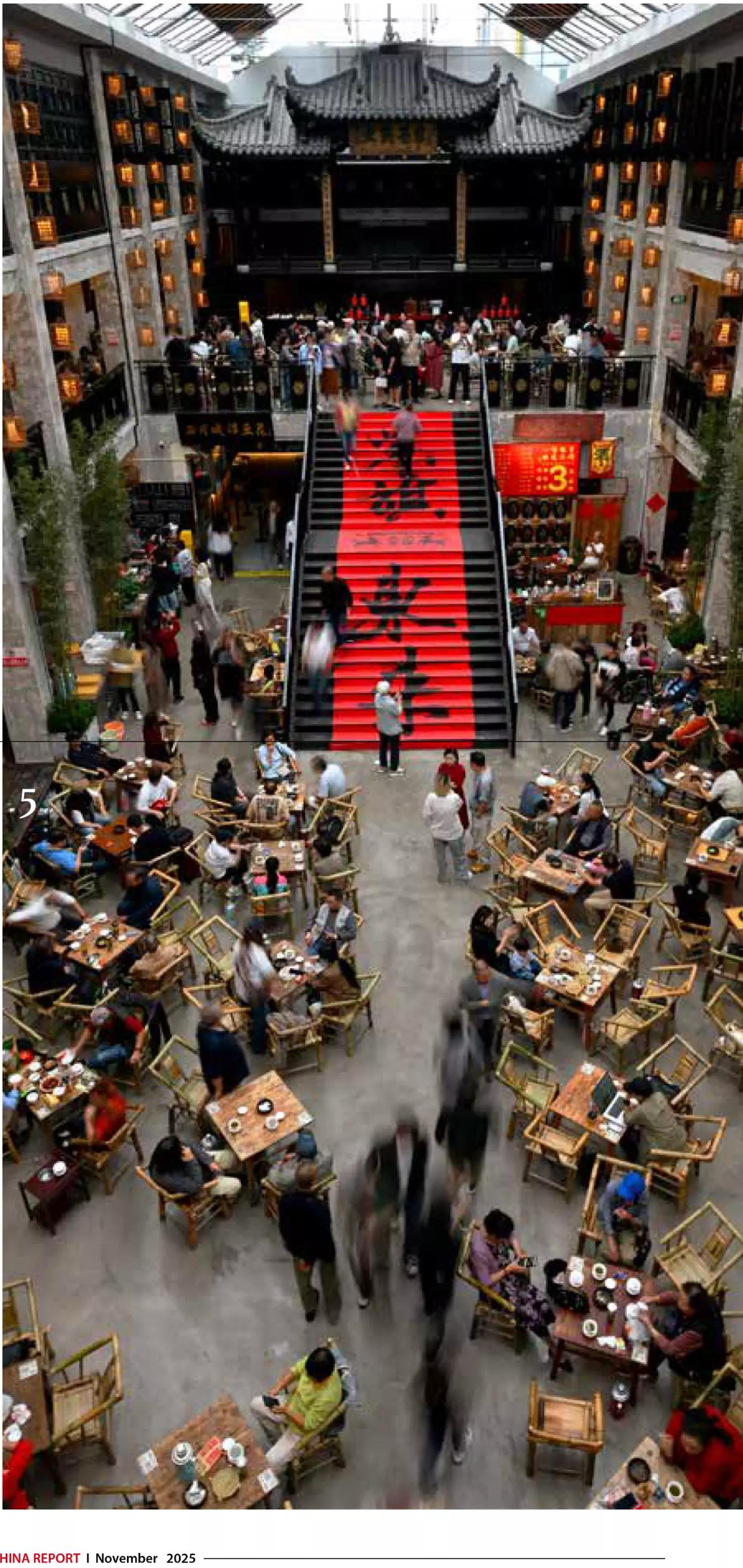

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喔喔之歌
A song To WoWo

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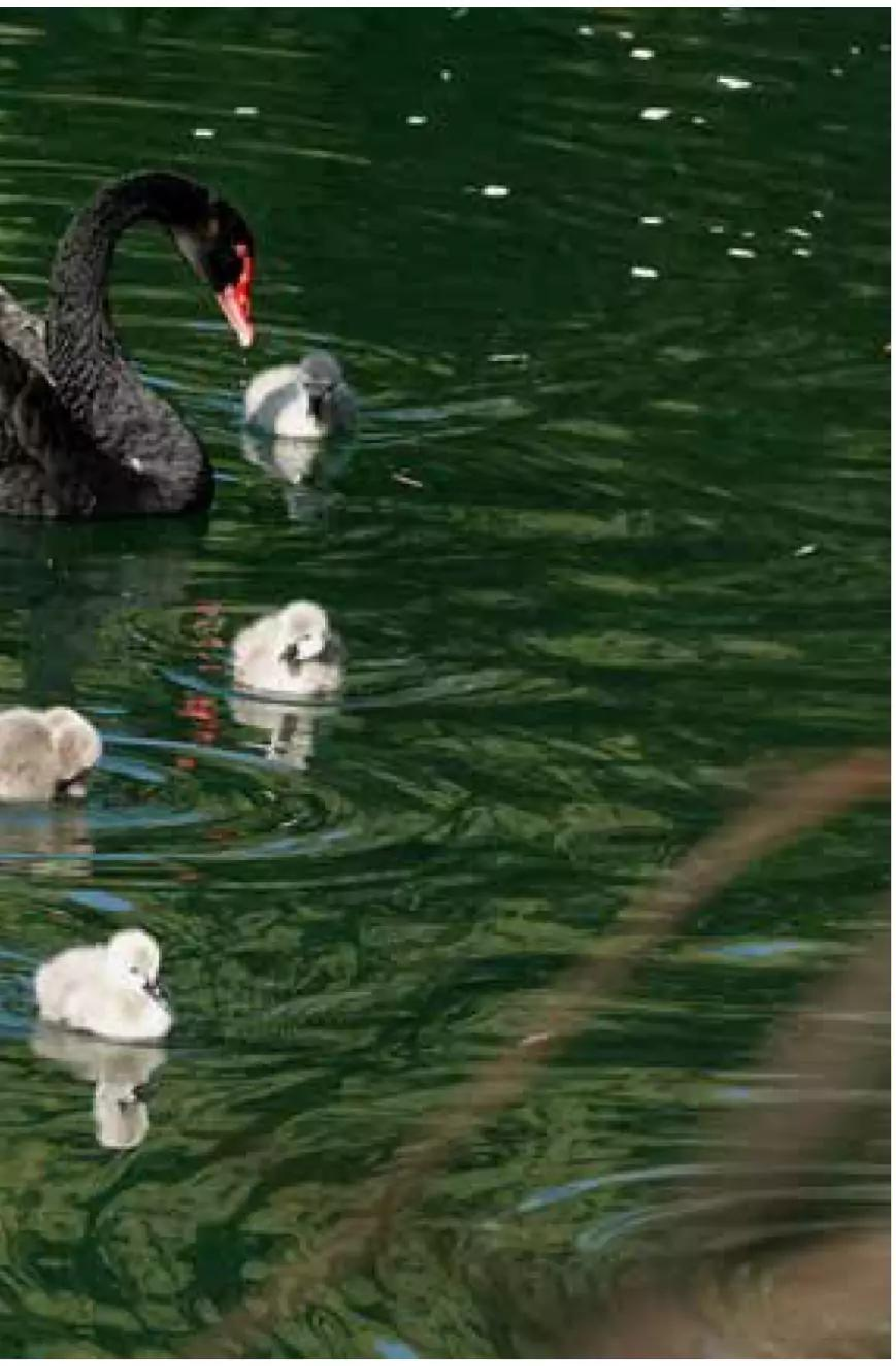
1. A ceremony is held to celebrate Wo Wo, China's first hand-reared walrus calf, turning 100 days old at Zhuhai Chimelong Ocean Kingdom, Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, September 15, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

2. Black swan cygnets follow their parents to look for food on the lake at the Old Summer Palace, also known as Yuanmingyuan, Beijing, October 13, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

3. Autumn trees surround Sihailongwan Maar Lake, Baishan County, Jilin Province, October 1, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

4. A crowd gathers to watch the world's largest tidal bore on the banks of the Qiantang River, Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, October 9, 2025 (Photo by IC)

5. A technician uses handheld controllers to guide a humanoid robot to fold laundry during a training session at Hangzhou Bay Embodied Intelligence Innovation Centre, Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, September 14, 2025 (Photo by VCG)



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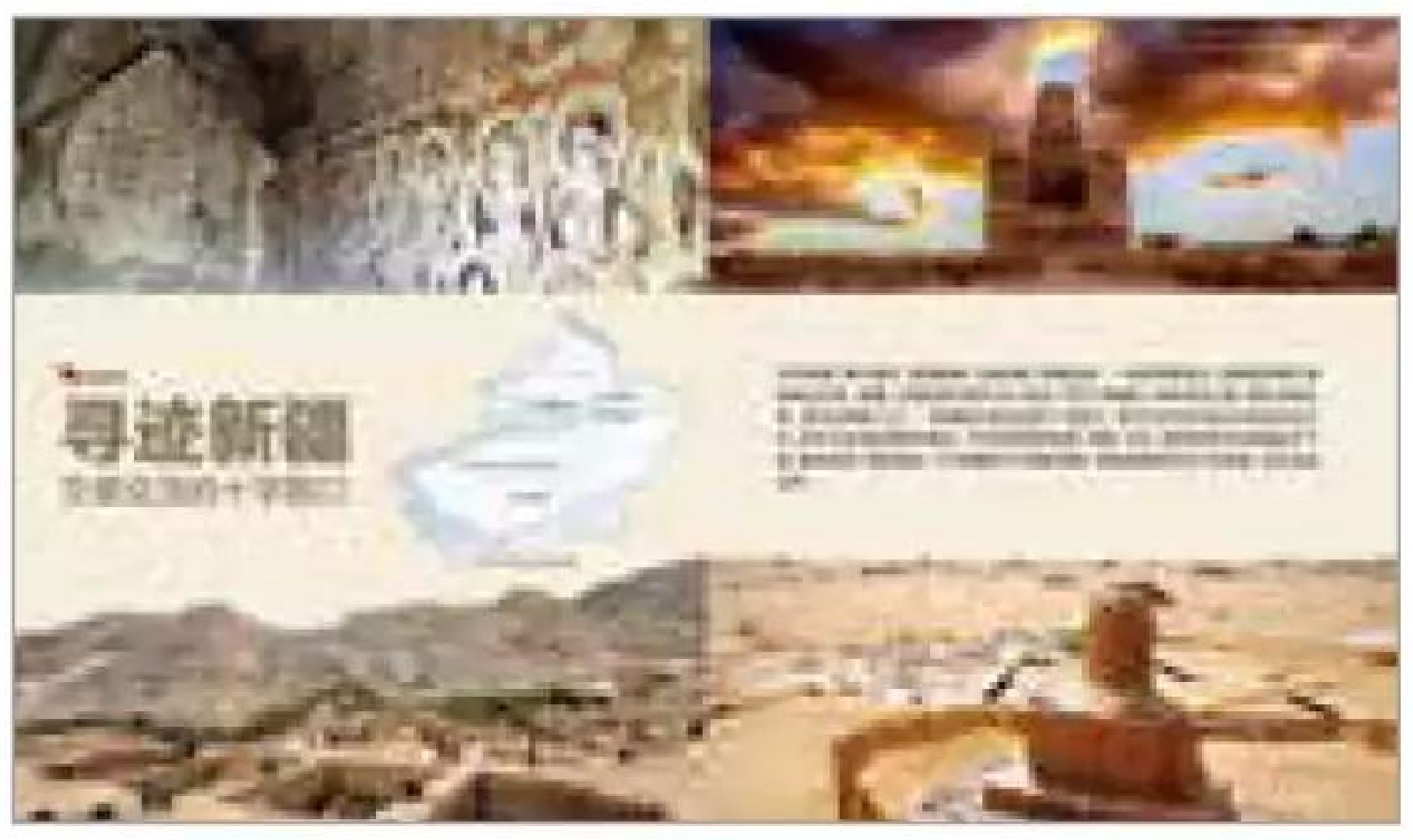
AGIBOT
WOLONG

Ancient Ruins in Xinjiang Reveal Silk Road Glory

China Newsweek October 6, 2025



The weathered rocks, eroded foundations and well-preserved silk embroideries excavated at sites in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region have revealed the dynamic prosperity of the ancient Silk Road. Booming in China's Han (202 BCE - 220 CE) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, Xinjiang connected East and West Asia to form a bustling intersection for trade and cultural exchanges. To dive into its historic vibrancy, archaeologists over the past few decades have excavated the ruins of communities, fortresses, Buddhist monasteries and engravings of Greek and Roman warriors that were demolished or obscured by storms and desertification. Thanks to their efforts, memories of the emergence and convergence of civilisations have been revived. There are mysteries around some ancient cities, people and kingdoms that archaeologists are trying to unravel by unearthing more relics. Protection plans have also been made, and the public can learn more about ancient cultures at museums and exhibitions.

Decline in Reading Risks Losing Imagination, Freethinking, Say Literature Lecturers

South Reviews October 6, 2025

In recent years, reading in China has been marginalised as people are obsessed with short videos and online games. Among all books published between 2019 and 2023, one-third only sold five copies or fewer. In cities, bookshops are shutting down, while in some rural schools, many pupils below 10 have never read a book. Experts warn that without books, there will be no deeper understanding of one's life. Zhang Qiuzi, a lecturer in literature at Yunnan Normal University, said that reading awakens students' innate curiosity, pushing them to explore areas in which they have doubts, and improving their critical thinking skills through introspection. He Guimei, a Peking University lecturer of literature, believes that reading is not only about learning, but also about the cultivation of minds and deeds. She said the essential value of reading is to free people's minds, disentangling them from the digital devices that enslave their souls.

Corporate PR Struggles to Meet New Challenges

Xinmin Weekly September 29, 2025

Public relations, a profession that has to find a balance between sincerity and rationality, has thrived since the China's adoption of a market-oriented economy some 40 years ago. However, it is being challenged in the information age, a time when the wrong approaches to alleviate negative social impacts could be disastrous. The latest online drama between Jia Guolong, founder of nationwide restaurant chain Xibei, and entrepreneur-influencer Luo Yonghao, is the latest example of PR gone awry. Confronted by Luo over Xibei charging high prices for pre-made food, Jia fired back in a feud that lasted for days, until Jia finally conceded with an apology. Experts pointed out that Chinese entrepreneurs would be better off hiring PR professionals to address public crises instead of responding with unfiltered posts on social media.

Higher Education Looks to Broaden Student Skillsets

Yi Magazine
September 15, 2025

Great Bay University (GBU) in Dongguan, Guangdong Province, has challenged the fundamentals of China's higher education institutions since the start of this academic year. At GBU, freshmen can change their majors freely and the student-teacher ratio is lower than at traditional universities. It also emphasises that humanities are still essential for all STEM students. While concerned about graduate employment prospects, GBU expects its students to be more well-rounded, rather than merely churning out graduates who satisfy market demand. Other new institutions, including Fuyao University of Science and Technology and Westlake University, also adhere to non-traditional approaches to education. Educators are calling for reform to China's rigid learning system, which prioritises test scores more than the need for individual growth.

Deep-Tech Firms Soar on Chinese Stock Markets

Caijing Magazine
September 29, 2025

By September 22, deep-tech companies, referring to firms focused on ground-breaking high-tech development like AI and biotech, have replaced banks, non-bank financial institutions and real estate developers to become the backbone of China's capital markets. Of the top-50 listed companies by market value in China's A-share markets, 24 are high-tech firms. According to financial database Wind, 60 percent of the 70 IPOs completed in the A-share markets by September 18 were for tech companies, and on the Hong Kong bourse, biotech, medical facilities and software services are the top-three sectors for IPOs. With a more inclusive market, high-tech startups, though unprofitable, can be listed. On August 28, China's AI chip producer Cambricon briefly overtook liquor maker Kweichou Moutai as the top firm by stock price. Investors should still exercise caution over high-tech firms, especially when key technology breakthroughs are unlikely in the short term, experts said.

"Consumers are willing to pay a premium for emotional value, and this is perfectly reasonable behaviour. People often say the ACGN (animation, comics, games and novels) community has driven the growth of the merchandise economy, which is tied to these fandoms. But in truth, every generation has its own objects of emotional attachment."

Lao Guoling, distinguished researcher at the Chinese Modernisation Institute and director of the E-Commerce Research Centre, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, in an interview with *Decision Making* magazine

"The future of AI trade depends on whether it becomes an open, win-win market or a new, exclusive circle marked by steep technological barriers. The key lies in enabling developing countries to participate in global AI governance and building fair, inclusive international rules for AI trade."

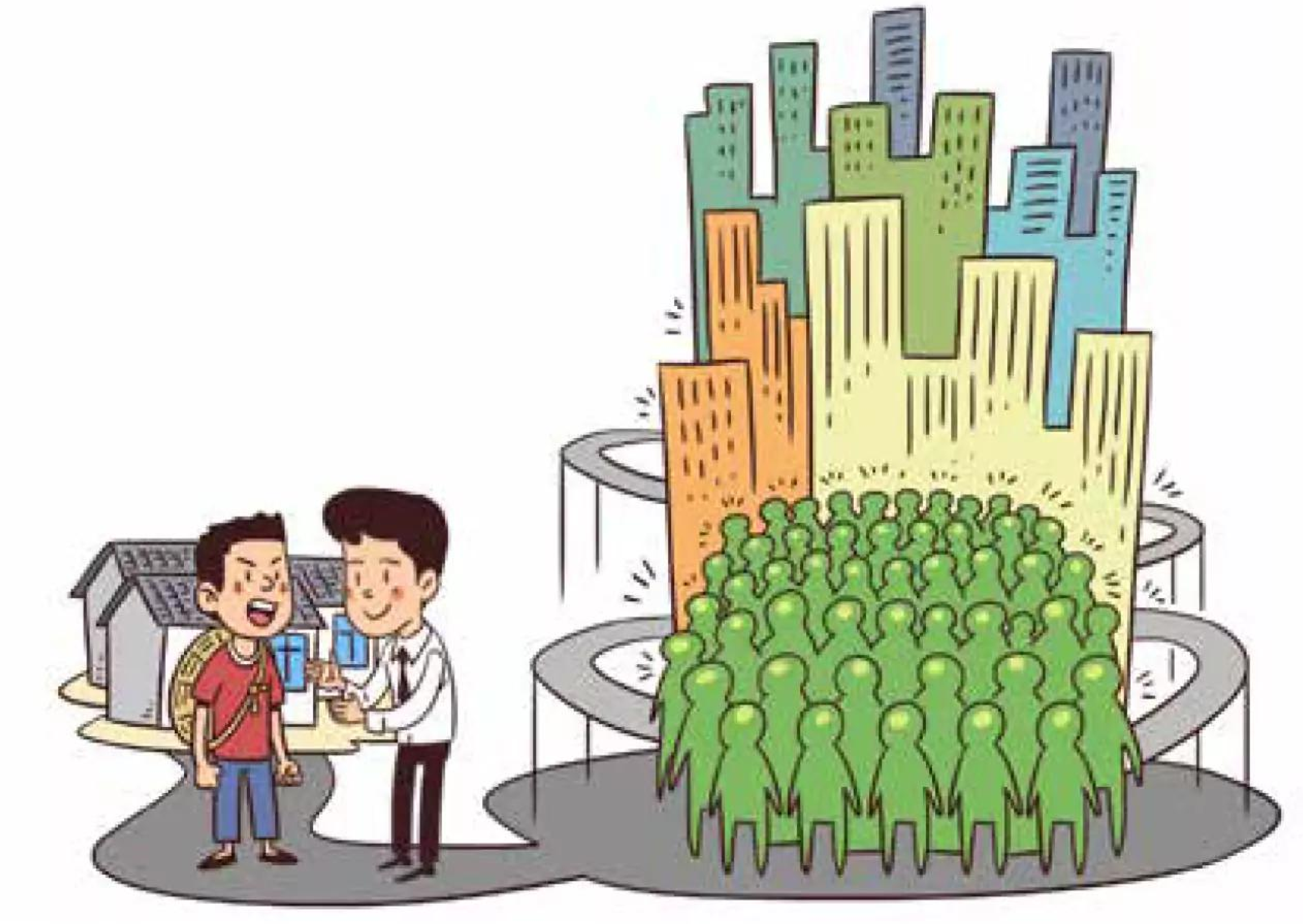
Jiang Tianjiao, deputy director of the Centre for BRICS Studies and a researcher at the Centre for Global AI Innovation Governance at Shanghai's Fudan University, in a September interview with *People's Daily* overseas edition

"AI technology has greatly improved research efficiency and iteration speed. National computing and data infrastructure continue to advance, while more enterprises are integrating AI into their core strategies. With effective synergy among policy support, patent deployment, academic research and product application, China's innovation capacity is expanding in both scale and quality."

Yao Xu, researcher at the Centre for Global AI Innovation Governance, Fudan University, analysing China's performance in WIPO's Global Innovation Index 2025, in an interview with *People's Daily* overseas edition

"I hope robots in the future are made as simple as possible, like one brain connected by just a few wires, and each arm powered by only one cable."

Wang Xingxing, founder of Unitree Robotics, speaking at the Qualcomm 2025 Summit in Beijing, September 24-25, noting that humanoid robots have limited internal space and that too many cables increase the risk of failure



"Population loss in small towns is a clear sign of regional demographic imbalance. It not only adds pressure on major cities but also weakens small towns' ability to support agriculture, rural areas and farmers. Some towns should be restructured, by adjusting the ratio of civil servants to permanent residents, so that more fiscal resources can go towards improving livelihoods."

Qiu Baoxing, former vice minister of the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, in a September article for *Governance*, a magazine under *People's Daily*

"Big data, the internet, the Internet of Things and AI are all just tools. Traditional industries should embrace these technologies to cut costs and boost production efficiency, not abandon their core business to chase tech for its own sake."

Cao Dewang, founder of Fuyao Glass, in a recent interview with *People's Daily*

"Don't feel inferior or carry any burden from your past. Everyone makes mistakes, but you've experienced more than most people, and that gives you greater insight and wisdom. Don't waste it. Be grateful, and live like light."

Yu Donglai, founder of DL Supermarket in Xuchang, Henan Province, speaking to newly released inmates the company plans to hire

"We should fully recognise the valuable qualities of grassroots internet celebrities and the major contributions they've made to local tourism. But a city's cultural tourism can't rely solely on one individual. What's needed is a sustainable, institutional model for tourism development."

Li Qinyu, chief commentator at news portal The Paper, on the rise of grassroots street vendors and snack sellers who have become viral tourism ambassadors, like "Chicken Cutlet Brother" (Li Junyong) in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province

Xinjiang Celebrates Great Progress 70th Years after Founding

Chinese President Xi Jinping led a central delegation to Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, on September 23 to attend activities marking the 70th anniversary of the region's founding. Xi told officials at a meeting in Xinjiang that the region should uphold the principle of pursuing progress while ensuring stability, and make continuous efforts to build a socialist modern Xinjiang that is characterised by unity, harmony, prosperity, affluence, cultural progress and a sound eco-environment.

Located in far Northwest China, Xinjiang was the first provincial ethnic autonomous region of the People's Republic of China. In the seven decades since, Xinjiang has undergone a profound economic and social transformation, with regional GDP rocketing from 1.23 billion yuan (US$173.2m) in 1955 to 2.05 trillion yuan (US$288.7b) in 2024, with annual GDP growth at around 7 percent.

Four days before Xi's visit to Xinjiang, China's State Council published a white paper titled "CPC Guidelines for Governing Xinjiang in the New Era: Practice and Achievements."

The white paper reveals that every year, more than 70 percent of Xinjiang's general public budget is allocated to improving people's well-being.

According to the white paper, Xinjiang eradicated absolute poverty in 2020. By the end of 2020, over 3.06 million impoverished rural residents, 3,666 impoverished villages and 35 impoverished counties had emerged from absolute poverty. Xinjiang's per capita disposable annual income of urban residents soared 133-fold to 42,820 yuan (US$6,031) and 162-fold to 19,427 yuan (US$2,736) for rural residents in 2024, compared to the figures in 1978.

Xinjiang's employed population has risen from 12.46 million in 2012 to 13.91 million in 2024, up 11.64 percent. All children now receive preschool education and free nine-year compulsory education, with the gross enrolment rate of secondary school hitting 97.74 percent.

By the end of 2024, the number of people covered under the basic pension and basic medical insurance systems in Xinjiang accounted for over 95 percent of the total population in their category, with average life expectancy increasing from 30 years in 1949 to 77 years in 2024. Also in 2024, about 12.5 percent of Xinjiang's economy came from primary industries, 39.6 percent from secondary industries and 47.9 percent from tertiary industries.

As a vital link between China and the rest of the world throughout the Silk Road since ancient times, Xinjiang now occupies a strategic position in the Belt and Road Initiative. In 2024, 16,400 freight trains travelled through Xinjiang on the China-Europe Railway Express.

The number of Xinjiang's economic and trade partners has increased significantly from a small handful in the 1950s to 196 countries and regions in 2012, and to 211 in 2024.

Xinjiang has become an extremely popular tourist destination with 302 million tourist arrivals in 2024, a 6.21-fold increase compared to that in 2012.

Ecological progress is remarkable too, as the Taklimakan Desert, the world's second-largest drifting desert, is now encircled by a sand-blocking green belt stretching 3,046 kilometres, the longest in the world.

The white paper stresses that Xinjiang respects and protects ethnic minorities' right to learn and use their own spoken and written languages and that Xinjiang administers religious affairs in accordance with the law. The document reveals that Xinjiang has formulated plans for the protection of regional cultural heritage and has released local regulations to strengthen legal guarantees for preserving cultural heritage.

According to the white paper, the central government provides special support for Xinjiang in terms of funds, projects, preferential policies, industry support and investments. Since 2012, the central government has allocated more than 4 trillion yuan (US$563.4b) in transfer payments to Xinjiang, including nearly 543.48 billion yuan (US$76.5b) in 2024 alone.

Shanghai Launches Digital Yuan Operation Centre

An international operation centre for the digital yuan commenced operations in Shanghai on September 25, The People's Bank of China (PBoC) announced.

Alongside the launch, the centre revealed it will operate via three platforms, which include a cross-border digital payment platform, a blockchain service platform and a digital asset platform.

PBoC Deputy President Lu Lei said the central bank provides open, inclusive and innovative solutions to cross-border financial transactions and it has preliminarily established an infrastructure system for cross-border finance related to the yuan based on the principle of "Non-impairment, Compliance and Interoperability" proposed by the Bank for International Settlements.

Experts said the centre will help China reduce its reliance on the dominant SWIFT payment system, streamline the management of cross-border financial transactions and explore new applications for blockchain technologies.

Internet Courts' Scope Adjusted to Boost Cyberspace Governance

China's top judicial authorities announced an adjustment to the type of cases that can be heard in the country's internet courts which were set up to deal with cases involving cyberspace, including e-commerce disputes and online copyright issues.

The Supreme People's Court (SPC) released a new judicial interpretation on the jurisdiction of cases by internet courts on September 11.

The new interpretation aims to adjust and clarify the jurisdictional boundaries of the country's three internet courts, based in Beijing, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province and Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. Most importantly, the courts will handle four new types of cases: those related to the ownership and infringement of internet data, cases related to online personal information and privacy, cases related to the ownership, infringement and contract dispute of virtual assets, and online disputes related to unfair competition.

Some cases will no longer be dealt with by internet courts, including online loan contract disputes and copyright and neighbouring rights disputes related to works first published online. These cases will be moved to local courts from November 1, when the new interpretation takes effect.

A spokesperson from the SPC said the move will protect citizens' online rights and interests in a fairer and more efficient way, prevent algorithm manipulation and promote the healthy development of the digital and platform economy.

Emergency Meteorological Response System Achieves Nationwide Coverage

According to the China Meteorological Administration (CMA), an emergency response mechanism triggered by early meteorological alerts now covers the whole of China.

The announcement was made on October 11 when China's State Council held a press conference to discuss the achievements of the country's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025).

According to CMA Director Chen Zhenlin, China has already established a land-marine-sky meteorological observation system which consists of nine Fengyun satellites, 842 weather radars and more than 90,000 ground meteorological stations. The system has increased China's detection rate for disastrous weather to 83 percent and improved the advanced detection rate of severe convective meteorological events by 13 percent.

The "seamless and full-coverage" intelligent digital system can forecast regional rainstorms, high temperatures and cold waves 3-7 days in advance, predict national weather disasters 15 days in advance and predict global weather anomalies six months in advance, Chen said.

China's direct economic losses from meteorological disasters as a percentage of GDP dropped by 0.12 percent on average during the 14th Five-Year Plan. In the same period, the whole country has used artificial rainfall and snow enhancement to increase precipitation by 167.7 billion tons, and artificial hail suppression operations have reduced economic losses by 60.3 billion yuan (US$8.5b).

China's meteorological services have benefited over 70 industries, including agriculture, traffic and transportation, healthcare and new energy like wind power.

China Pavilion Wins Gold Award at Expo 2025 in Osaka

At the Expo 2025 Osaka held in Kansai, Japan from April to October, the China Pavilion won the Gold Award in the Large Self-Built Pavilion category, China's first gold award at a comprehensive expo overseas.

With the theme of "Building a Community of Life for Man and Nature – Future Society of Green Development," the China Pavilion, covering 3,500 square metres, distinguished itself by combining traditional Chinese aesthetics with cutting-edge technologies. It showcased China's traditional ecological philosophy over its long history, using Chinese cultural elements like bamboo and ancient poems. At the same time, it highlighted China's achievements in modern green development using new materials, new energy and new technologies like AI.

According to Li Qingshuang, deputy director of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, the China Pavilion attracted over 1.9 million visitors from all over the world, including nearly 300 political dignitaries from 95 countries and regions.

Two New Biosphere Reserves Added to UNESCO List

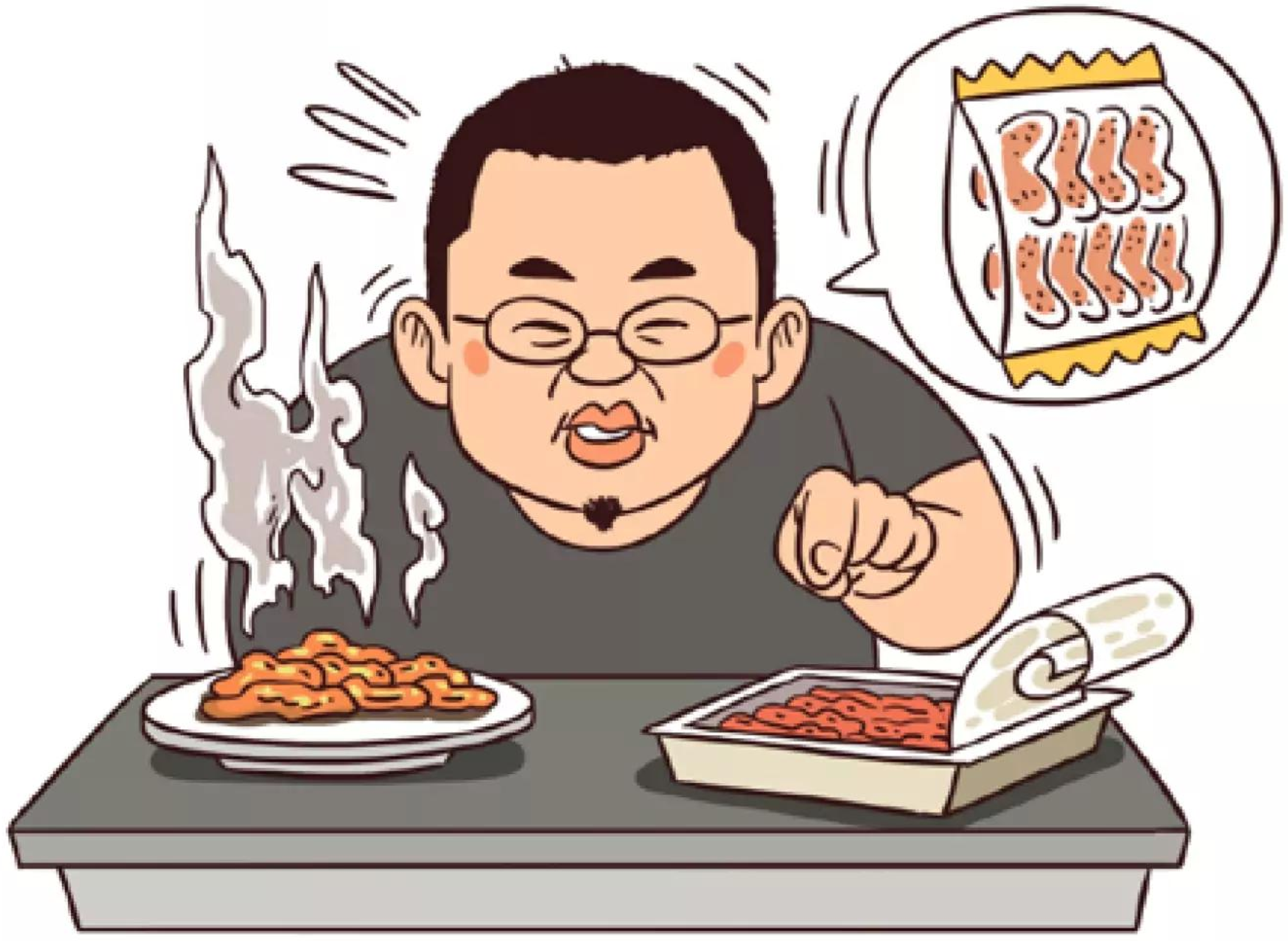
China has two new UNESCO biosphere reserves, Daqingshan Biosphere Reserve and Zhouzhi Biosphere Reserve, a recognition of their ecological importance.

UNESCO announced on September 27 that it has designated 26 new global biosphere reserves, including the two in China.

Located in the Yinshan Mountains in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Daqingshan Biosphere Reserve, covering nearly 3,900 square kilometres, has the greatest biodiversity in the Yinshan Mountains. It is home to about 1,179 higher plant species, 300 types of vertebrates and 1,800 types of insects and other bugs.

Located in the Qinling Mountains in Shaanxi Province, Zhouzhi Biosphere Reserve, around 690 square kilometres in area, has a forestry coverage rate of 96 percent with abundant plant and animal resources, including endangered species like giant pandas, golden snub-nosed monkeys and takins, also known as gnu goats.

Launched in 1971, UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme aims to find a balanced way to promote sustainable social and economic development while protecting natural resources. There are now 785 UNESCO biosphere reserves worldwide.



Food Fight: Influencer Grills Nationwide Restaurant Chain Over Pre-made Meals

A prominent influencer's post-meal complaint recently stirred up debate over pre-made meals that social media is still having trouble digesting, prompting a response from food safety authorities.

Luo Yonghao, a former teacher turned online celebrity, posted to Sina Weibo on September 10 about his "truly disgusting" dining experience at the nationwide chain Xibei, which serves northwestern Chinese cuisine.

Criticizing it for serving dishes that were "almost all pre-made and so expensive," Luo also called on authorities to legislate mandatory labelling for restaurants to indicate whether pre-made meals are used.

The next day, Xibei's founder Jia Guolong responded in an interview with Shanghai-based The Paper, stressing the distinction between "pre-prepared foods" and "pre-made meals." He insisted his restaurants do not serve pre-made meals. Jia even invited diners to view the kitchens of Xibei's nearly 400 outlets to prove his claim.

However, sleuthing netizens posted images seemingly confirming that Xibei used packaged and frozen ingredients. Xibei issued a public apology on September 15, admitting that its practices had fallen short of consumer expectations and pledging to improve operations.

The dispute sparked discussions about the growing use of pre-made food in China's dining industry. Many netizens argued that pre-made dishes are not inherently unacceptable, but that restaurants mislead consumers by selling them at high prices without disclosure.

Some said they expect frozen pre-made dishes to be sold in supermarkets or convenience shops, but freshly cooked meals when dining out. Others took a more neutral stance, saying restaurants should not be banned from using pre-prepared ingredients as long as prices are reasonable and labelling is transparent.

On September 21, the State Council Food Safety Office announced plans to accelerate the introduction of standards for pre-made meals and labelling requirements for restaurants.

Netizen Comments:

- Pre-made meals are completely unsuitable for Chinese cuisine. Anyone who cooks Chinese food regularly knows that most dishes taste best when freshly made. These meals are acceptable only at fast-food restaurants with low prices. Consumers won't tolerate middle- or high-end restaurants charging premium prices for frozen food.
- I can buy pre-made meals at Sam's Club and heat them at home. Why should I pay restaurant prices for something I can easily prepare myself?
- Restaurants can serve pre-made dishes, but such food shouldn't dominate China's catering industry. Authorities should set clear standards and strengthen supervision to ensure food safety and quality.

Source: Zhihu

Media Comments:

Zhu Yi, associate lecturer, College of Food Science and Nutritional Engineering, China Agricultural University: "In terms of taste, pre-made meals may not earn perfect scores, but they can at least pass. Consumers should set aside their prejudice against pre-made food and learn to read ingredient and nutrition labels. The key issue is ensuring consumers are clearly informed about whether pre-made meals are used and that their choices are respected."

Source: China Youth Daily

Ma Lihong, senior partner, Beijing DHH Law Firm: "It's necessary to introduce laws and regulations requiring food manufacturers and restaurants to provide explicit labelling on pre-made food packages and menus, detailing additives, ingredients, nutritional information and reheating instructions."

Source: Legal Daily

***People's Daily*, State-owned newspaper:** "Restaurants should offer transparent information about pre-made dishes so consumers can make informed choices. The real challenge surrounding pre-made meals is not technical. It lies in rebuilding consumers' trust."

Source: People's Daily website

When Art Backfires: Himalayan Fireworks Display Sparks Outcry, Official Investigation

A Chinese artist's work involving colourful explosions high in the Himalayas of Southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region has ignited widespread criticism and an official investigation over its potential damage to the area's fragile ecosystem.

Cai Guoqiang, known for his large-scale gunpowder installations, staged the event on September 19 in collaboration with outdoor brand Arc'teryx. The daytime performance involved three sets of colourful explosives ignited along a mountain ridge at an altitude of around 5,500 metres in Gyangze County of Xigaze, the second-largest city in Xizang.

The spectacle lit up not only the alpine meadows but also Chinese social media. Many netizens accused the artist and brand of harming Xizang's delicate ecosystem and showing cultural insensitivity, as the mountains are considered sacred in Tibetan Buddhism.

In response to the backlash, both Arc'teryx and Cai issued public apologies on September 21. Cai stated that the fireworks were made of biodegradable materials and met pollution standards in Japan and Europe.

However, environmental experts pointed out that such standards, designed for urban settings, do not apply to high-altitude regions. The fragile alpine ecosystem lacks the microorganisms needed to break down those materials, meaning the degradation process could take decades or even centuries.

Scientists also noted that the explosions likely damaged the thin vegetation layer on the meadows, accelerating soil erosion that could take up to 50 years to recover naturally. Local wildlife, including Tibetan antelopes within several kilometres, were also believed to have suffered stress reactions due to the loud detonations.

On September 21, Xigaze authorities announced that an investigation team had been dispatched to the site. Their report was released on October 15, stating that the fireworks impacted a grassland area of 30.06 hectares, and that firework debris and plastic fragments were not fully cleared up, causing damage to the soil and grass mat structure. The intense bursts of light and loud noises also disturbed wildlife. A number of local officials have been punished.

INFLUENCER

Chicken Cutlet Brother

Li Junyong, affectionately known online as "Chicken Cutlet Brother," has become the Chinese internet's flavour of the month since late September.

The 48-year-old street vendor from Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province, sells 6-yuan (US$0.84) fried chicken cutlets at his stall, and wins customers' hearts with his humour, warmth and efficiency.

On September 21, a customer posted a Douyin video showing Li skillfully juggling multiple orders with lightning speed and good cheer. The video went viral, garnering over 2.16 million likes and 55,000 comments. His sudden fame led him to be named "Cultural Tourism Promotion Ambassador" on September 28 by his hometown of Jingdezhen, which is world famous for its porcelain.

Li has been selling homemade snacks in Jingdezhen since 1996, offering everything from pork pancakes and cold noodles to kebabs and meat pies, though his fried chicken cutlets remain the most popular. Five years ago, he moved his stall near a local middle school, serving mostly students.

Li adheres to a few principles: He always gives priority to students, serves only students from 4 pm on weekdays and charges them 1 yuan (US$0.14) less than other customers. His sincerity and optimism have resonated deeply online.

In his short videos, Li often chats warmly with customers, sharing simple life wisdom such as: "It's not about what we eat, but about being happy," "I hope you'll give me a chance to serve you. You can refuse me, but don't refuse delicious food." As one popular comment put it: "A 6-yuan chicken cutlet delivers 600 yuan (US$84) worth of emotional value."

During the National Day holiday from October 1-8, Li's fame drew crowds of tourists to Jingdezhen just to taste his crispy cutlets. As of October 11, he had over 990,000 followers on Douyin.

Lease on Life: Young Tourists Swap Buying for Renting

From drones to camping gear, cameras to cars, more young Chinese tourists are opting to rent rather than purchase big ticket items for their travels. During the bumper National Day holiday from October 1 to 8, rental orders surged as travellers looked for affordable and flexible ways to enjoy their trips.

According to Didi Car Rental, bookings rose by 212 percent during the holiday. On Aizujii, a leading electronics rental platform, orders for devices have tripled since September. DSLR camera rentals increased by 420 percent year-on-year, while drone rentals climbed 350 percent.

Data from the Development Research Centre of the State Administration for Market Regulation showed that China's rental sector grew by 32 percent in 2024, reaching 4.2 trillion yuan (US$589b) in transactions and serving over 750 million users.

Behind the boom lies a major shift in consumer behaviour among younger generations, from "owning" to "accessing" and from "long-term possession" to "instant gratification," said Xu Mingyuan, a researcher at Chongqing Technology and Business University, in an interview with the *Chongqing Daily.*

China-US Relations

Entering a New Phase?

Retaliating against Washington's new sanctions with tightened rare earth controls, China is adopting a more assertive approach towards US pressures, shifting from mitigating damage to seeking reciprocity on equal-footing

By Yu Xiaodong

Imported Brazilian soyabeans are unloaded from a ship, Yantai Port, Shandong Province, June 17, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

Since the US launched its trade war against China in 2018 under US President Donald Trump's first term, the world's two largest economies have endured years of friction in various fields. Under the Biden administration, bilateral relations further drifted apart as Washington stepped up its containment policies and escalated technological bans under the so-called "small yard, high fence" policy.

For much of the past eight years, China's response to what it described as US "bullying" was largely defensive, focusing on preventing fallout and minimizing damage rather than matching Washington's pressure with countering retaliation.

However, after Trump assumed the US presidency for the second time and launched a new tariff war against China and much of the rest of the world, the picture has shifted as China opted for a much tougher stance than before.

Instead of seeking negotiations to reach compromises like most other countries have done, China matched Trump's every tariff threat, which went as high as 245 percent, with reciprocal counter-measures.

In September, the two countries engaged in several high-level diplomatic interactions, including phone calls between the Chinese and US defence and foreign ministers, and trade negotiations held in Madrid, Spain.

On September 18, Chinese President Xi Jinping held a video conversation with Trump, the third time this year. Both leaders described the conversation as "constructive." Subsequently, Trump said he would meet with Xi in South

Korea in November during the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, and that the two leaders agreed to visit each other's countries. China has not confirmed whether Xi would attend the APEC meeting or accept the mutual visits.

While none of these talks resulted in any major deals, the positive tone from the leaders of both countries and the prospect of a face-to-face meeting between Xi and Trump led many analysts to believe the world's two largest economies had reached a tactical détente that would help stabilise bilateral relations. Nevertheless, as containing China's rise continues to be among the top priorities of both the Trump administration and the US Congress, the fragile truce has already proved to be short-lived.

Workers mine rare earth minerals, Yunnan Province, March 18, 2008 (Photo by VCG)

Swift Escalation

Only a few days after the Xi-Trump call, Washington launched new restrictive measures targeting Chinese interests.

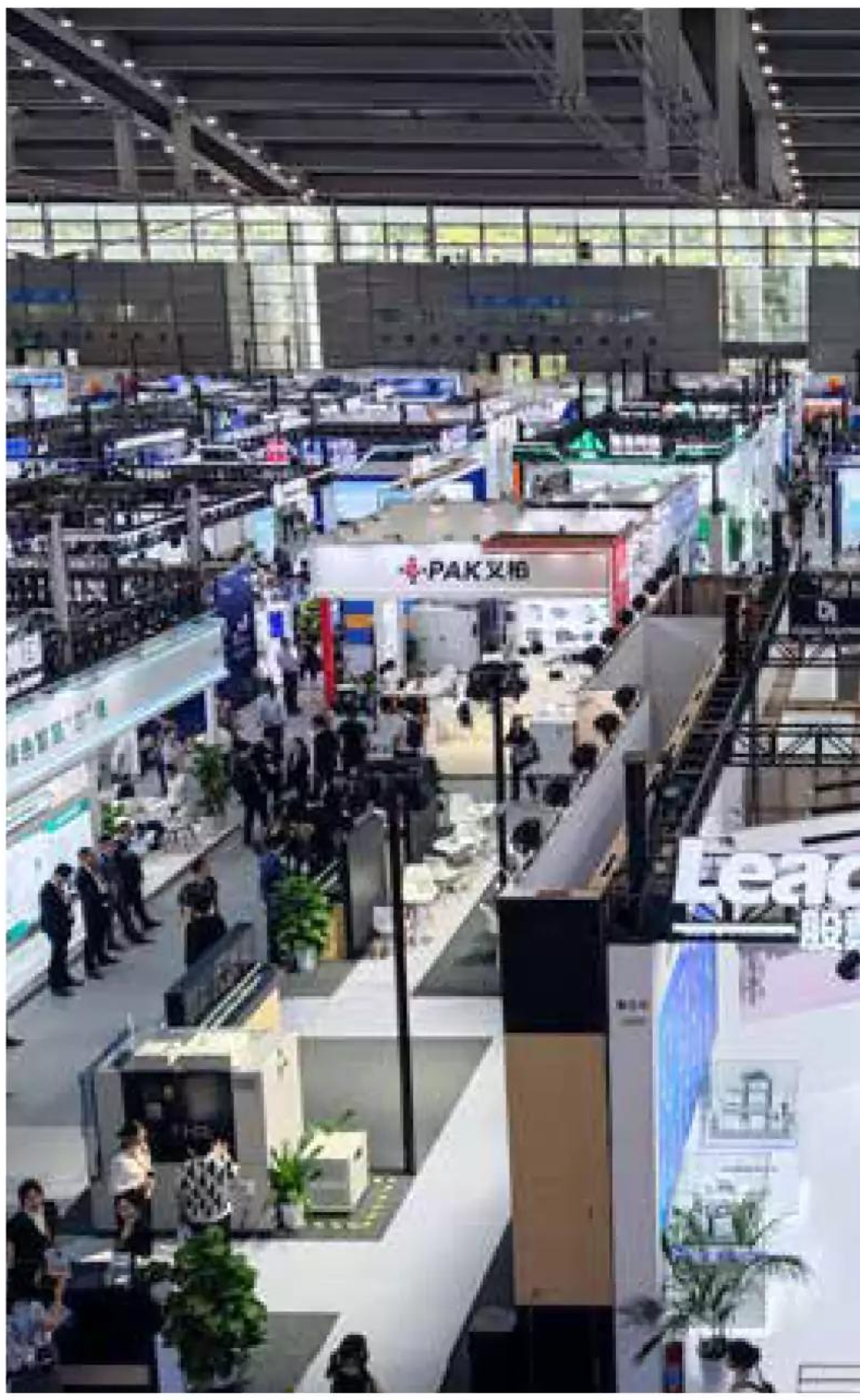
On September 25, Trump announced new tariffs on goods including lorries, pharmaceutical products, kitchen cabinets and upholstered furniture, many of which are imports from China.

On September 29, the US Commerce Department released an interim final rule, which vastly expands export controls on non-US entities owned 50 percent or more, directly or indirectly, by any of the roughly 3,000 already blacklisted Chinese companies. The new rule is expected to add a few thousand more Chinese companies to the blacklist.

On October 7, a bipartisan committee of the US Congress released a report on the development of China's semiconductor industry, calling for broader bans on chip-making equipment sales to China. In the meantime, the US Trade Representative's decision to impose port service fees on ships owned, operated and built by Chinese companies took effect on October 14.

On October 9, China fought back, as China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) issued multiple notices, tightening export controls on rare earth materials, related equipment and technologies, and permanent magnets.

China had already tightened export controls on rare earth materials in April as part of the response to Trump's



"reciprocal" tariffs. The new rule expands the list of controlled elements to include holmium, erbium, thulium, europium and ytterbium, covering all heavy rare earth elements. It also places new controls on specific materials, magnets and technologies containing these elements.

MOFCOM has made clear that any requests to use rare earths for military purposes will be automatically rejected and that exports of rare earth materials used in highly advanced technologies, including sub-14-nanometre semiconductors, next-generation memory chips, semiconductor manufacturing or testing equipment, will be subject to case-by-case review by Chinese authorities.

China also for the first time applied the so-called foreign direct product rule (FDPR), a mechanism the US introduced to restrict semiconductor exports to China from non-US companies if these products incorporate US technology, software or equipment. MOFCOM's rule states that any rare earth products manufactured abroad using Chinese technology or containing over 0.1 percent of China-produced minerals will be subject to approval by Chinese authorities.

China also mirrored the US's decision to impose port fees on China-linked vessels. In a separate notice announced the same day, MOFCOM imposed port service fees for US-linked vessels, including those owned or operated by US entities or individuals, those with 25 percent or more US ownership or control, those flying the US flag and those built in the US.

Moreover, China added 14 foreign companies, most of which are based in the US, to its "unreliable entity list," which bans them from carrying out commercial operations in China, including any export and import activities.

The following day, on October 10, China announced it was opening an anti-trust investigation into US semiconductor firm Qualcomm for its alleged failure to declare details of its acquisition of Israeli chip designer firm Autotalks to Chinese authorities.

In response, Trump said in a Truth Social post on October 10 that he would impose a 100 percent tariff on China, effective November, "or sooner, depending on any further actions or changes taken by China." Despite the new threat, China remains defiant.

Regarding Trump's new tariff threats, a Q&A statement MOFCOM released on October 12 stated that "resorting to threats of high tariffs is not the right way to engage with China."

Emphasizing that China's moves are defensive actions against the US's new restrictive measures, the statement warned that "if the US persists in acting unilaterally, China will resolutely take corresponding measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests."

"Our position on a tariff war remains consistent – we do not want one, but we are not afraid of one," MOFCOM said.

Changing Strategy

For many observers, China's new moves mark a watershed shift in its strategy in handling its disputes with the US, which now emphasises reciprocity and parity.

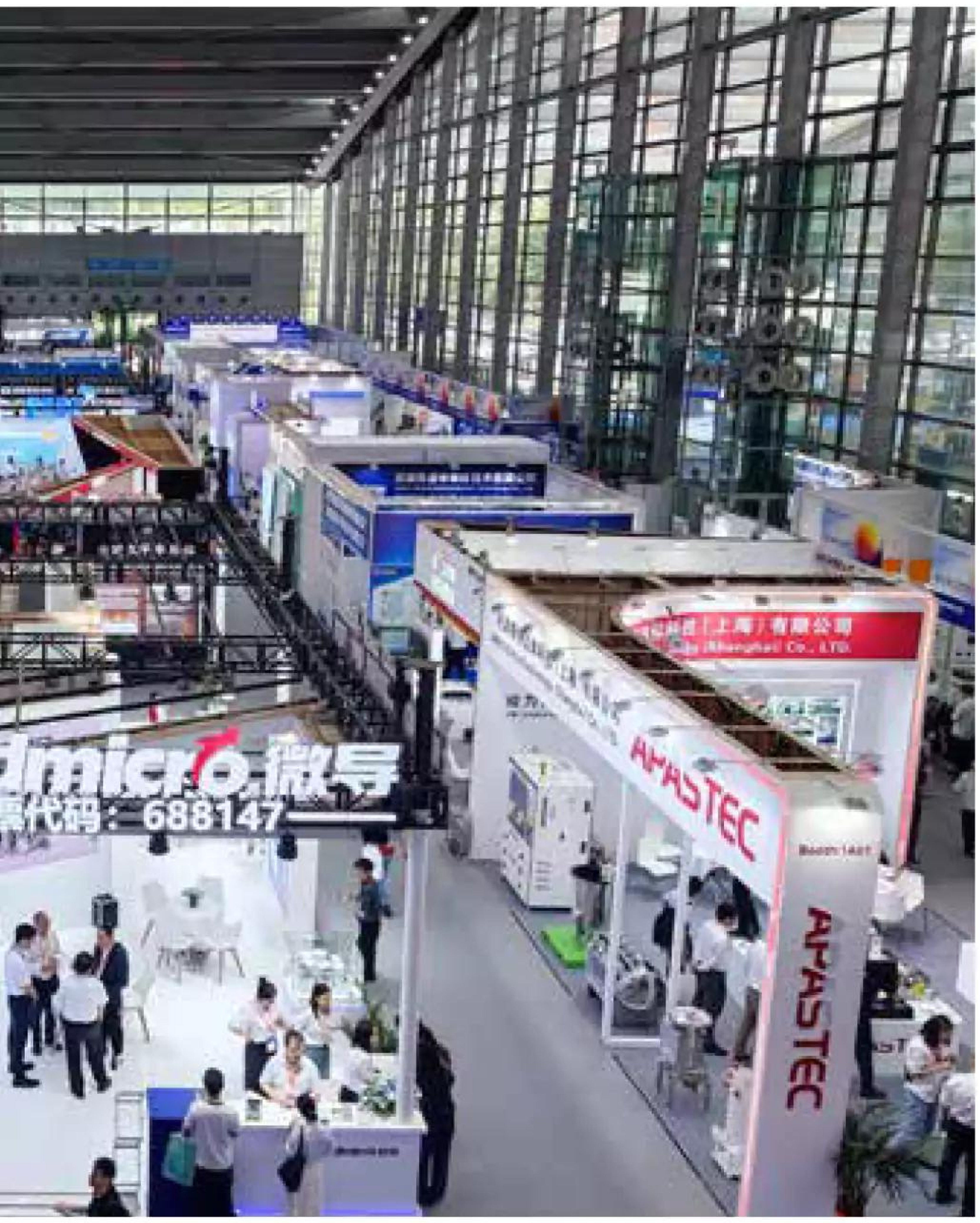
"China's latest countermeasures reflect a new framework that is strictly reciprocal in its strategy – whatever move the US makes, China will respond in kind and with equivalent strength," said Shen Yi, a lecturer of international politics at Shanghai-based Fudan University, in his regular podcast for guancha.cn on October 11.

"When the US restricts exports of advanced chips, China restricts critical minerals. When Washington expands sanctions through its entity list, China responds with its own unreliable entity list, Shen said. "Through the interaction, a dual game structure has emerged – rare earths versus high-end semiconductors."

Shen stressed that China's moves reflect a growing confidence in dealing with the US from a position of strength. "Instead of merely taking symbolic actions, China is now pursuing countermeasures that are effective and grounded in its own strengths," he said. "The use of this kind of precise, asymmetric deterrence is likely to become the new normal in China-US relations."

The principle of mutuality and reciprocity has been a constant theme of Chinese diplomacy since Trump took office early this year. In March, Lin Jian, a spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry, made clear that Beijing would not back down if the Trump administration sought to reignite a trade war.

"Intimidation does not scare us. Bullying does not work on us. Pressuring, coercion or threats are not the right way of dealing with China. Anyone using



The second WESEMiBAY Semiconductor Ecosystem Expo 2025 kicks off in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, October 15, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

maximum pressure on China is picking the wrong guy and miscalculating," Lin said, "If war is what the US wants, be it a tariff war, a trade war or any other type of war, we're ready to fight till the end."

It is the same sentiment underlying the recent MOFCOM statement. Behind the rhetoric, China's message is clear: It will engage the US from a position of strength, not weakness.

China's growing confidence stems from a consolidated position in the global supply chain, despite the headwinds. According to data released by China's General Administration of Customs, total goods trade in the first nine months of the year increased by 4 percent, with exports surging by 7.1 percent and imports dropping slightly by 0.4 percent.

In September, China's exports in dollar terms increased by 8.3 percent, much higher than market expectations. While China's exports to the US have been steadily declining, with a 27 percent year-on-year drop in September, the gap has been filled by alternative markets. Exports to the European Union, ASEAN countries and African countries surged by 14, 15.6, and 56.4 percent respectively.

With the US market now accounting for less than 10 percent of China's exports, the impact of Trump's threat to impose higher tariffs on Chinese goods is far less serious than it was eight years ago. Meanwhile, despite technology bans imposed by the US, China's high-tech sector has experienced rapid growth. In the first three quarters of the year, high-tech exports increased by 11.9 percent year-on-year, with the export of industrial robots jumping by 54.9 percent.

'Fighting While Talking'

Despite China's increased assertiveness, its overall strategy remains defensive. In its statement, MOFCOM emphasised that China is open for negotiations. Calling for the US to continue to adhere to "the important consensuses of the phone calls between the two heads of state" and continue to use the China-US economic and trade consultation mechanism, it urged the US to "promptly correct its wrong address" and "address respective concerns and properly manage differences through dialogues and on the basis of mutual respect and equal-footed consultation."

In his September call with Trump, Xi reiterated that China seeks to make joint efforts with the US to achieve "mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation." The fact that China's new rare earths export control mechanism will become effective only on December 1 leaves ample room for further negotiations.

After threatening to cancel his expected meeting with Xi and increase tariffs on China by 100 percent, which sent the US stock market into a slump, Trump softened his tone on China. In a Truth Social post on October 12, Trump said the US would like to "help China, not hurt it." "Don't worry about China, it will be all fine!" he added, without elaborating.

It remains unclear whether or when the two leaders will have a face-to-face meeting, but most analysts believe that bilateral relations will not completely disintegrate.

In a commentary published on domestic media outlet guancha.cn on October 11, Jin Canrong, a lecturer of international politics from the Renmin University of China, said Beijing's countermeasures against the US are expected to stay within defined limits.

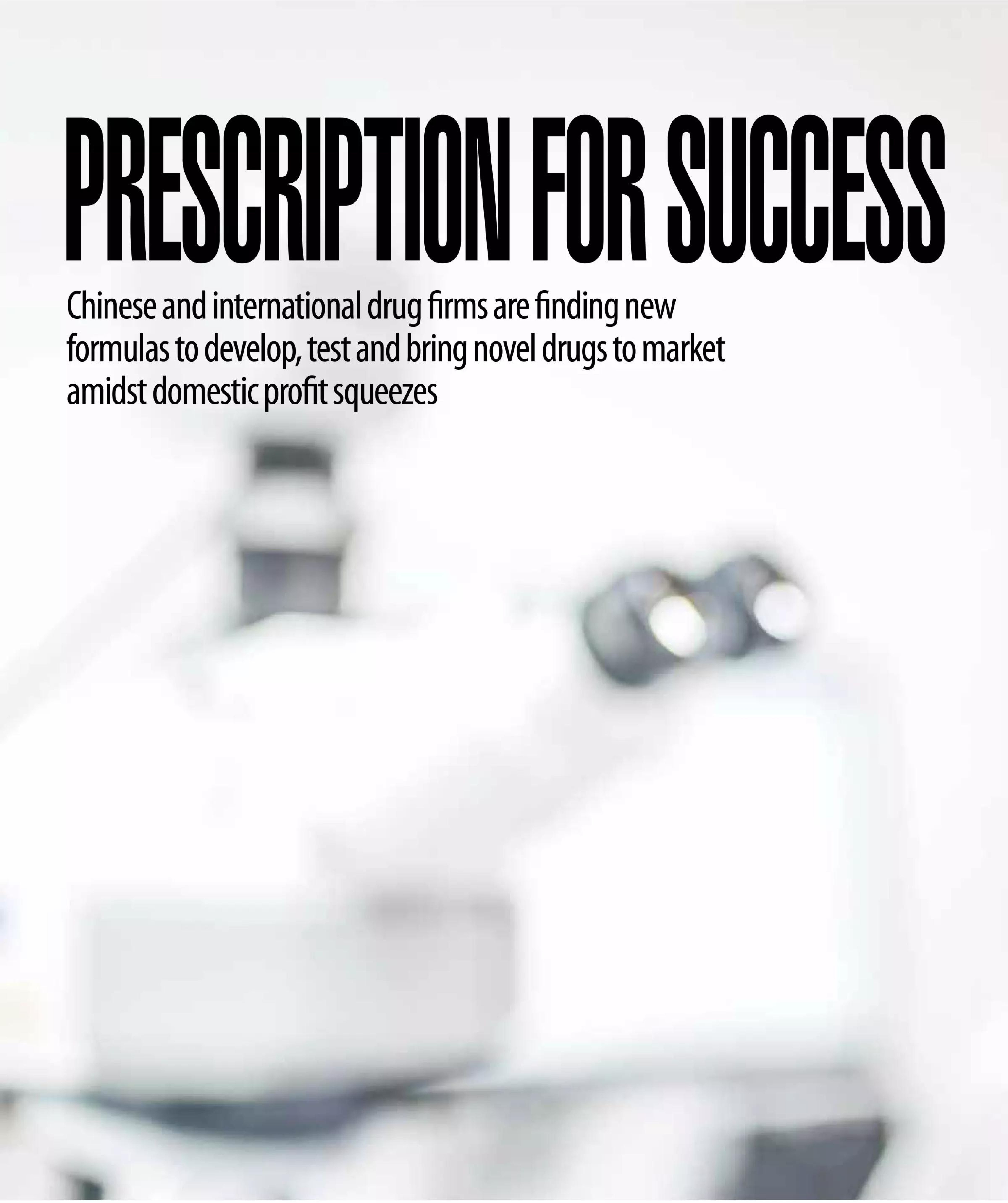
"The future of China-US relations will be characterised by 'fighting while talking,'" Jin said. "The US often employs a 'carrot and stick' approach in the game of major power competition, and China is now prepared to play by the same rules," he added.

"China has long sought to maintain stability and continuity of its policy towards the US," Liu Qing, lecturer and vice president of the China Institute of International Studies, told *ChinaReport*. Liu emphasised that by learning from history and adapting to the future needs of global development, it is imperative that China and the US are partners, not rivals.

"Mutual respect and equal consultation are key principles refined through bilateral economic and trade talks, and they should remain essential for cooperation across all areas between the two countries," Liu added.★

PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS

Chinese and international drug firms are finding new formulas to develop, test and bring novel drugs to market amidst domestic profit squeezes



Pharmaceuticals

Biotech Bottleneck

A pharmacist checks medicines in a smart pharmacy, Third People's Hospital, Deqing County, Huzhou, Zhejiang Province, April 2, 2023 (Photo by Xinhua)

After a decade of heavy investment, China's domestically developed novel drugs have finally reached the market. Yet for the country's biotech sector to remain profitable and sustain innovation, experts are prescribing systemic reforms in healthcare

By Huo Siyi and Niu He

China announced on July 1 the creation of a specialised reimbursement catalogue for domestically developed novel drugs that had previously been too expensive to be covered by the country's basic medical insurance system.

Soon after, the first nationally unified Clearing and Settlement Centre for both basic and commercial medical insurance began trial operations in several of Beijing's top hospitals, including Peking Union Medical College Hospital.

Similar trials have been underway in cities and provinces such as Shanghai, Shandong and Guangdong over the past two years. The new system allows patients to claim reimbursements from both basic and commercial medical insurance simultaneously, eliminating the need to submit multiple hospital bills to insurers days after receiving basic insurance payouts. The reform makes costly indigenous novel drugs more affordable and accessible.

China has introduced a series of policies to encourage innovation in drug development since January, sparking renewed market confidence in the biopharmaceutical sector. Among 39 listed innovative drug producers that released semi-annual reports by August, 27 reported net profit growth, according to financial data platform Wind.

By September 30, the Hang Seng SCHK Innovative Drug Select Index, which tracks 37 major pharmaceutical companies listed in Hong Kong with the top 10 from the Chinese mainland, had risen by 108 percent year-to-date.

China's biopharmaceutical boom did not happen overnight. It took nearly a decade, roughly the full cycle of a novel drug's journey from laboratory to production, for the industry to mature. From 2015 to 2024, a combination of policy support, capital investment and talent development drove the rise of the country's innovative drug ecosystem.

However, industry insiders caution that high production costs and an inappropriate pricing system continue to hinder profitability and investor confidence, both of which are crucial for sustaining future innovation in China's domestic biotech sector.

Injection of Growth

Systemic reforms, global integration and improved financing have been key to China's biotech transformation.

On July 22, 2015, authorities issued a notice urging 1,622 drug registration applicants to recheck and correct their clinical data to ensure accuracy and completeness. Companies that refused to amend falsified or incomplete data faced penalties.

The clampdown on clinical data fraud marked the beginning of a decade-long reform of China's healthcare and pharmaceutical systems, aimed at building a quality-driven, innovation-oriented biotech industry.

On August 9, 2015, the State Council released a circular on reforming the review and approval system for drugs and medical devices. The document redefined "innovative drugs" as those novel not only in China but globally, encouraging innovation over repetitive production of low-quality generics.

In subsequent years, a series of policies accelerated the evaluation and approval of new drugs both domestic and foreign, particularly those with significant clinical potential.

"That year [2015] witnessed a massive influx of capital and the return of overseas-trained scientists who launched startups focused on innovative drugs," said Wang Li, CEO of a biotech firm in China, in a June interview with the *21st Century Business Herald*.

Two years later, China's Food and Drug Administration (now the National Medical Products Administration, or NMPA) joined the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH), a global nonprofit established in 1990 to standardise the scientific and technical aspects of drug registration. Membership in the ICH is widely regarded as essential for ensuring efficient, high-quality drug approval processes.

"This is no less significant than China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO)," said Wang Shuguang, a partner at Shenzhen-based medical investor GTJA Investment Group, in an interview with The Paper in 2017. "It paved the way for the internationalisation of China's biotechnological industry in the long run."

Financing also became easier. On April 30, 2018, the Hong Kong Stock Exchange amended its Main Board Listing Rules to allow certain biotech firms to go public that had yet to turn a profit but possessed strong innovation potential. On June 13, 2019, the STAR Market, a board focused on high-tech stocks, launched on the Shanghai Stock Exchange. Within its first year, more than 20 biotech companies, including Bloomage Biotech, Haohai Biological Technology and Micro-Tech Endoscopy, were listed, according to a July report by China's Tianfeng Securities.

Citing Wind data, the report noted that the total R&D spending by Chinese biotech companies listed in either the Chinese mainland or Hong Kong increased more than sixfold between 2016 and 2024, from 19.2 billion yuan (US$2.7b) to 119 billion yuan (US$16.7b).

Another key factor has been China's so-called "engineer dividend." According to a June report by GF Securities, PhD graduates in medical sciences accounted for 18 percent of all PhDs in China in 2022, up from 11 percent in 2009.

By 2024, China had surpassed the US to become the world's largest producer of indigenous innovative drugs, totalling 3,575 items entering Phase I clinical trials since 2015, according to a 10-year review jointly released on March 18 this year by the Research Institute of Drug Regulatory Sciences at Tsinghua University in Beijing and life sciences data company PharmCube.

Patent activity in pharmaceuticals and medical technology has surged by 379 percent since 2014, according to the *Global Life Sciences Atlas*, published in May by US-based investment and real estate services firm CBRE.

In 2023 alone, China published 222,964 life science papers, achieving a compound annual growth rate of 11.38 percent over 10 years, according to a 2024 report by the China National Centre for Biotechnology Development.

医保门诊特药品
甲乙药品销售专柜

A pharmacy clerk collects drugs covered by China's basic medical insurance system, Zouping, Shandong Province, February 12, 2023 (Photo by CNS)

Hard to Prescribe

From mid-2021 to 2024, as huge investments and efforts finally began to bear fruit, China's innovative drug sector saw share prices continue to fall as investors doubted their chances of realising returns.

According to Wang Liming, a partner at Co-win Ventures, an investment group active in healthcare sectors across China, North America and Europe, the early boom in innovative drugs investment was driven by assumptions that their high prices and profit margins would be covered by China's basic medical insurance system or other third-party payment institutions, and that profits would be guaranteed in both domestic and overseas markets.

"Obviously, several years later, the two assumed conditions proved unconvincing," Wang said at a symposium in 2024.

Pharmaceutical companies had hoped their innovative drugs could enter public hospitals covered by national basic medical insurance to secure a steady cash flow. However, prices offered under the two existing insurance catalogues remain too low to make that possible.

In response to widespread complaints about expensive medical products, the two catalogues, one for full coverage and the other covering 70 to 90 percent of personal costs, were designed to ensure that basic medical services remain affordable for most citizens. As a result, most drugs listed are inexpensive generics.

To further reduce personal medical spending and improve oversight of the basic medical insurance system, the National Healthcare Security Administration (NHSA) has handled annual price negotiations since its establishment in 2018, procuring medicines from companies seeking inclusion in the two catalogues.

Over the next five years, 446 medicines were added to basic medical insurance at a total cost of 340 billion yuan (US$48b), an average of less than US$10 billion per year.

Chinese pharmaceutical firm Wuxi AppleTec's Central China site Biolake forms part of Wuhan National Bioindustry Base, Wuhan, Hubei Province (Photo by VCG)

The discounts, often 50 to 70 percent, have created a steep "launch cliff" for innovative drugs.

For example, Ivonescimab, a bispecific antibody injection produced by Akeso for lung cancer, dropped its price from 2,299 yuan (US$332) per dose to 736 yuan (US$103) after being added to basic medical insurance earlier this year.

"In developed countries, the prices of medicines fall only when their patents expire, whereas in China, the prices plummet once the drugs are rolled out on the market," said Song Ruilin, CEO of the China Pharmaceutical Innovation and Research Development Association.

"Despite the painstaking efforts behind an innovative drug, earning forecasts in the domestic market are nothing but pious hopes when margins are squeezed so hard," he added.

According to Song, the pharmaceutical sector has reached a consensus that basic medical insurance alone cannot support high-cost, long-term innovative drug development.

"With time-consuming research and development and high failure rates, drug innovation can be aborted when investors lose confidence once prices are set too low to cover costs," said Zhu Xun, a former expert with the National Advisory Committee on New Drugs and lecturer at Jilin University. "Lack of economic returns will hinder innovation."

An arm robot works on a production line at a pharmaceutical factory, Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, July 5, 2024 (Photo by VCG)

Even when new drugs gain access to hospitals, it can take at least two years before they are prescribed, said Yu Qiang, CEO of Shengshi Taike Biopharmaceutical Technology.

"Innovative drug developers are always confounded that after spending enormous time and resources on price negotiations with the NHSA, their medicines are still denied access to domestic hospitals," said Yang Dajun, CEO of Ascentage, a listed Chinese pharmaceutical firm.

In many public hospitals, innovative drugs can only be approved after review by Pharmacy Affairs and Therapeutic Committees (PATCs), which make and update hospital drug lists.

However, as several pharmaceutical representatives told *ChinaReport*, these committees often postpone meetings for long periods. In some hospitals, members convene only once or twice every two years.

The anti-corruption campaign launched in the healthcare sector in 2023 also had an impact. Analysts believe the campaign made hospitals more cautious about prescribing expensive drugs or services, even though its purpose was to push pharma companies to focus more on innovation than on aggressive marketing.

Third Catalogue

To address these issues, healthcare authorities began introducing measures in early 2025. On September 20, the NHSA published new guidelines for the next round of national collective drug procurement that seeks to curb "over-competition," requiring companies to promise that their quotes would not fall below cost.

At a January 2025 press conference, the NHSA noted that savings from collective procurement were being used mainly to expand the number of innovative drugs in the national basic insurance catalogue. By July, the agency announced that about 80 percent of innovative drugs had been covered by basic healthcare insurance within just two years of reaching the market.

Later, the NHSA said that 121 innovative drugs categorised by generic names as of August 12, including five high-value cell therapy drugs, had passed preliminary assessment for inclusion in the third catalogue.

This new catalogue would allow innovative drugs not yet covered by basic insurance to reach public hospitals via commercial medical insurance.

"The new policy is particularly flexible and beneficial to pharmas producing cell or gene therapy drugs priced above 500,000 yuan (US$70,350)," said Jin Chunlin, director of the Shanghai Health Development Research Centre.

At the July press conference, the NHSA also promised that experts from commercial insurance firms would play a major role in price negotiations for drugs listed in the third catalogue.

Still, questions remain. "It is uncertain whether commercial medical insurance firms can bargain independently or only within government-set price ranges," an NHSA official told *ChinaReport* anonymously.

"The authorities should still determine criteria for selecting and pricing innovative drugs in that catalogue," Jin said.

Domestic pharmaceutical firms remain cautious about joining the new catalogue due to the small number of people covered by commercial insurance and the difficulty of getting into public hospitals.

Since 2019, China has adopted two payment systems: Diagnosis Related Groups (DRG) for hospitalised patients and Diagnosis Intervention Packet (DIP) for outpatients. As both aim to control expenditure, hospitals tend to choose inexpensive drugs from NHSA's first two catalogues.

In 2024, China's commercial health insurance spending on innovative drugs and medical devices reached about 12.4 billion yuan (US$1.7b), accounting for less than 8 percent of total medical spending (162 billion yuan or US$23 billion). That rate was 36 percent lower than basic insurance expenses and 41 percent lower than out-of-pocket spending, according to a white paper published in March 2025 by China RE Life, MediTrust Health and Boston Consulting Group.

Given the diverse goals, financial capacities and operating models of China's commercial insurance companies, whether State-owned, private or joint ventures, it will be difficult to reach consensus on drug pricing, said Chen Hao, director of the Medicine Policy and Management Research Centre at Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan.

Song advised that commercial insurers should establish their own payment systems and set drug prices based on market demand and individuals' ability to pay, rather than administrative control.

Yang Dajun suggested that the country allow innovative drugs, especially those granted conditional approval by the NMPA, to enter public hospitals as soon as they are eligible for NHSA price negotiations.

"It's not only because those drugs are few in number, but also because they meet urgent clinical needs and involve significant technological barriers," he said.

Zhu Xun believes much more needs to be done to design a system that balances insurers' profitability with drug accessibility. Even after innovative drugs are covered by commercial insurance, he said, pharmaceutical companies will still seek inclusion in national health insurance catalogues to secure steady revenue, as most innovative drugs are prescription-only.

"The solution depends on a sound payment mechanism and smooth hospital access for innovative drugs," Zhu said.

Calls to reform pricing and payment systems for innovative drugs have grown louder in recent years, either by overhauling the national medical insurance system or separating hospitals from drug sales.

But struggling pharmaceutical companies cannot afford to wait for years for such change. For now, their most immediate lifeline may lie overseas.★

Medical products are displayed in a booth at PharmChina, a major exhibition for China's pharmaceutical and healthcare industry, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, May 22, 2025. Now in its 90th year, the exhibition attracted companies from more than 30 countries and regions around the world (Photo by VCG)

Pharmaceuticals

Pharma Chameleon

Chinese drugmakers are adapting to new conditions, licensing cutting-edge treatments worldwide, undercutting rivals on price and eyeing a bigger slice of the global market

By Shi Ruoxiao and Wu Jin

Chinese biopharma firms are going global fast. Over the first eight months of 2025, their out-licensing innovative drug transactions reached US$87.4 billion, well exceeding the US$55.4 billion recorded for 2024, according to an October report by the China National Pharmaceutical Industry Information Centre (CPHIIC).

Out-licensing allows one pharma company to let another use its intellectual property, under specific terms, usually in exchange for payment. An example might be a smaller company that has developed a new drug, but licenses it to a bigger company to complete later development and trials and bring it to market.

As the number and quality of novel drugs developed by Chinese companies have increased, they have attracted the attention of multinational firms. Last year, China's National Medical Products Administration (NMPA) approved 48 first-in-class indigenous drugs, eight more than 2023 and the highest in five years.

First-in-class refers to drugs that feature a new and unique way to treat a disease. In the first half of 2025 alone, 41 first-in-class drugs received marketing approval, only seven short of the 2024 total.

While out-licensing seems to be the best option for Chinese pharma firms eager to monetise innovation, many are now cooperating with multinational giants in more sophisticated and diverse ways to strengthen their global presence.

With huge market demand and growing competitiveness, Chinese drugmakers inspire confidence in their global prospects. However, breaking into the first-in-class tier on the world stage will take time and experience.

Chic and Cheap

"Over the past few years, an increasing number of Chinese pharma firms have participated in international symposiums where they've dominated discussions on Antibody-Drug Conjugates (ADC) and bispecific antibodies (BsAb)," said Wang Jinsong, founder, chairman and CEO of Harbour BioMed, established in Shanghai in 2016. ADCs are targeted cancer therapies, while BsAbs are antibodies that can bind to two different targets at once.

According to the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), 89 out of 184 research studies on ADC "pipelines" (a term for compounds under development by pharmaceutical companies) presented at its annual conference in Chicago this May were from China. Chinese pharma firms released 34 BsAb findings, accounting for about 49 percent of the research projects unveiled at the conference.

China's first-in-class pipelines now account for 24 percent of the global total, second only to the US. Since 2020, it has ranked first worldwide in the number of new drugs entering into phase I clinical trials each year, Tianfeng Securities reported in July.

In July, Biokin Pharmaceutical from Sichuan Province became the first company in the world to complete phase-III clinical trials for a BsAb to treat nasopharyngeal cancer.

"China's pharma sector has strategically transitioned from fast-follow production to first-in-class innovations and global cooperation," Liu Tianran, a partner at Singapore-based Vertex Ventures, told *ChinaReport*.

Meanwhile, Chinese novel drugs are much cheaper than global ones.

"In some mature medical areas, innovative drugs from Chinese firms can cost 80 percent less, take 70 percent less time in the R&D cycle and display at least 80 percent efficacy compared to their US counterparts," Tang Jun, founder of the biotech consultancy InScience-WeTrust BioAdvisory, told *ChinaReport*.

Global pharma giants, facing a looming "patent cliff," are hungry for new drugs. The CPHIIC report in October noted that patents for drugs generating more than US$180 billion annual sales revenue are due to expire in 2027 and 2028. These factors make China's novel drugs appealing. Wang Jinsong said his workdays often stretch past midnight because of his international partners across different time zones.

His company, Harbour Biomed, which develops antibody therapeutics for cancers and immune diseases, has completed 17 overseas out-licensing deals, including a deal in June with Japan's Otsuka worth nearly US$700 million.

According to Dealforma, a US-based database platform for the biopharma sector, about 30 percent of assets licensed by multinational pharma giants in 2024 came from Chinese companies.

Approximately half of up-front payments for cancer therapy pipelines have shifted from US biotech companies to Chinese ones, Tang Jun said.

By 2024, Chinese out-licensing deals had hit US$150 billion, with 18 drugs gaining overseas market authorisation, according to a report jointly published in March by Tsinghua University's Research Institute of Drug Regulatory Sciences and biotech data provider PharmCube. Several Chinese novel drugs had even outperformed foreign ones in clinical comparisons.

'Sprout Sales'

"[Drug] companies in China have refined a shrewd money-saving strategy: engineer novel drugs at a fraction of the cost borne by American firms, then license or sell them to US drugmakers while they are still early in development," wrote Scott Gottlieb, former commissioner of the US Food and Drug Administration, in a *Washington Post* opinion article on September 22, 2025.

Analysts note that out-licensing early-stage drugs shifts the risk of later-stage failure to foreign buyers and reflects that R&D data from China is now more accepted overseas.

However, this strategy, dubbed "selling sprouts" in the industry, has been raising questions. In November 2023, Guangdong-based BioTheus sold its anti-lung cancer BNT327 to German company BioNTech for a US$55 million up-front payment and around US$1 billion in milestone and marketing commissions. A year later, BioNTech acquired BioTheus in a share swap valued at US$950 million.

Then, in June, US pharma firm BMS and BioNTech struck a US$11.1 billion deal for the same drug as its core asset, creating a nearly US$9 billion premium.

The case is not an exception. In August 2023, Hengrui Pharma from Jiangsu Province sold its respiratory monoclonal antibody pipeline SHR-1905 to US firm One Bio, with an up-front payment of US$25 million. When UK giant GSK acquired One Bio months later, renaming it Aiolos Bio for its core asset AIO-001 (formerly SHR-1905), the deal reached US$1.4 billion.

"Chinese pharma firms seem to profit handsomely from these business development deals, but they often lose out by abandoning their products' far greater potential value," said Chu Lei, a research fellow at Healthcare Executive, a Beijing-based online platform that tracks listed pharmaceutical firms, told *ChinaReport*.

One of the reasons is lack of experience. "Many Chinese companies neither fully understand their own pipelines nor study their overseas target markets

Doctors provide free medical consultations at a local community, Pingliang, Gansu Province, April 11, 2024 (Photo by VCG)

deeply enough, leaving them at a disadvantage when they negotiate out-licensing deals," Zhou Shuhua, chief analyst of Citeline, a UK-based pharmaceutical and med-tech think tank, told *ChinaReport*.

But survival pressures play an even bigger role. In 2015, China launched sweeping reforms in the healthcare sector to spur innovation. Policies streamlining the approval process, expanding financing for startups and upgrading quality standards for novel drugs fuelled massive R&D investment.

Capital flooded in, especially after Hong Kong established a new stock market board in 2018 to encourage tech startups to raise funds. The Shanghai Stock Exchange launched a similar board called the STAR Market in 2019. Chinese companies can choose to be listed on one or both.

"With the availability of quick money, overlapping pipelines were created, driven by capital flows," Zhou said.

Take the anticancer PD-1 and PD-L1 inhibitors, for example. In 2021 alone, 150 pharma firms registered more than 600 clinical trials for these medicines, nearly 200 of which reached phase III, according to db.yaozhi.com, which tracks clinical trials.

However, investors soon lost patience. Returns were slow due to public hospitals' limited access to innovative drugs, which is crucial for steady cash flow, and the glut of similar products. According to the Tianfeng Securities report, pharma companies raised only US$4.2 billion on the primary capital market in 2024, down from the US$16 billion peak in 2021.

An industry insider said that his company spent 2 billion yuan (US$281m) over 11 years on developing a new drug, plus 300 million yuan (US$42.1m) each year for further trials, but annual sales never exceeded 200 million yuan (US$28.1m). With revenue barely covering personnel costs, they had "no option but to depend on external funds," the insider said.

China's low operating costs is another advantage. "China has an army of relatively low-paid scientists able to churn out new compounds," Gottlieb wrote in his September article. Clinical trials in China and Australia are also much cheaper than in the US and Europe, according to Clinical Leader, a US-based clinical trial consultancy. It says that in China's case, faster recruitment and streamlined regulations also add to its advantages.

In 2023, Chinese pharma firms netted more than 21 billion yuan (US$2.95b) in up-front payments through licence-out, nearly doubling revenue raised by IPOs, according to PharmCube that same year.

In 2024, Chinese firms signed 90 overseas licensing deals worth over US$50 billion, Wang Xiaoning, director-general of the Department of Drug Price and Tendering Procurement under the NHSA, said at a July press conference.

Confidence and Barriers

Market confidence in overseas ventures for China's novel drugs has strengthened, and for good reason.

Policies continue to support innovation. On September 28, the State Council, China's cabinet, announced stricter rules for clinical trials, particularly for academic and ethics reviews, to improve quality and credibility.

International consultancy KPMG stressed that China's "ageing population is expected to escalate demand for healthcare solutions" in its April report "China Life Sciences Sector Overview and Outlook."

As Chinese pharma companies grew stronger, they began to provide end-to-end services, from drug discovery to manufacturing, often as outsourced partners for multinationals. By integrating into the global pharma supply chain, China has built its own full-fledged system, the Tianfeng Securities report said. "We now have plenty of options to get our medicines produced, with or without [overseas] cooperation," Wang Jinsong said.

The KPMG report added that as Chinese firms mature, they attract more overseas investors and enjoy greater options for partnership.

Technicians check equipment at a Jiangsu Hengrui Pharmaceuticals factory, Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province, December 13, 2021 (Photo by VCG)

In the past, Chinese companies often got only up-front payment from their "sprouts" sales, without much larger follow-up milestone earnings. This has changed. On October 12, Biokin announced an upcoming US$250 million milestone payment from US company Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS) due to clinical trial progress on their jointly developed drug for breast cancer. Another milestone came when Shanghai's Dizal Pharma won approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for its first-in-class oral lung cancer drug, Sunvozertinib.

Harbour BioMed also sold a 9.15 percent stake, worth US$105 million, to AstraZeneca in March, expanding their partnership to shareholding.

Chinese firms are also adopting a new cooperative model called "NewCo," allowing domestic drug makers to bring in foreign capital and management teams through newly created joint ventures.

For instance, when Hengrui Pharma sold a GLP-1 receptor pipeline for obesity and type-2 diabetes to US firm Hercules in May, it acquired a 19.9 percent stake in addition to upfront and milestone payments, making earnings more sustainable.

To become leading multinational conglomerates, Chinese drugmakers must build capacity in clinical trials across the world and expand marketing networks to reach end users, Chu told *ChinaReport*.

But challenges remain, as access to clinical resources in major hospitals across the US and Europe can be difficult to navigate and marketing networks are tightly controlled by established pharma firms.

Moreover, the US remains wary of China's biotech rise. Though the 100 percent tariffs announced by US President Donald Trump on September 25 will not impact most Chinese out-licensing deals, as they mostly involve early-stage development, concerns persist. "Democrats and Republicans have called America's reliance on China for medicines a national security vulnerability," *The New York Times* reported on September 10.

Domestically, reforms are needed to boost access to public hospitals covered by medical insurance, and regulations need to be revised to allow frontline doctors to further engage with pharma innovation. Some in China also worry that overseas out-licensing could lead to the loss of valuable intellectual property.

"The Chinese pharmaceutical industry can definitely scale up to be multinational conglomerates, but the process will take time," Chu said.★

Young tulkus take a tour at the Xizang Museum of Natural Science, Lhasa, Xizang Autonomous Region, December 17, 2021 (Photo by VCG)

Tibetan Buddhism

ENLIGHTENED FUTURES

In modern society, spiritual leaders of Tibetan Buddhism are pioneering efforts to benefit sentient beings that go beyond their traditional roles

By Wang Yan

In Tibetan Buddhism, tulkus, also referred to as "living Buddhas," believed to be the reincarnations of esteemed former spiritual masters, are among the most revered and cherished religious leaders. Prominent tulkus include Dalai Lamas, Panchen Lamas, Karmapas and Khyentses, all of whom hold significant influence within the tradition. The different titles reflect the periods in history they were installed and different sects of Tibetan Buddhism. Since the tulku system was established in the 13th century, these spiritual figures have been venerated as sacred beings, even regarded by many Tibetan Buddhist practitioners as possessing profound spiritual power. They have long been the focus of devotion, with disciples offering prayers to them as part of their spiritual practice.

In today's more open, rapidly changing modern society, tulkus from lineages with established histories are perpetually in the public eye, while the existing tulku system cries out for modernisation as society changes.

In the August 2016 article "Time for Radical Change in How We Raise Our Tulkus," Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, a lama of Tibetan Buddhism's Sakya School, a globally acclaimed innovative master of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as a film director and screenwriter, addressed the need for modern tulkus to integrate traditional Buddhist wisdom with the demands of contemporary society. Rinpoche is an honorific term used in the Tibetan language to show respect for reincarnated, older or accomplished Lamas or teachers of the Dharma (Buddha's teachings).

"Moving from one life to the next is not like moving from one room to another. There have been tremendous changes over time, which requires new forms of training if tulkus are to manifest their true nature and qualities," he wrote.

Pushing back against the trend of reducing Buddhism to "a profession designed to ensure the survival of monks, monasteries and dharma teachers," Dzongsar Rinpoche advocated reform. He proposed that to overcome the barriers of traditional societies which are "a complex mixture of heartfelt devotion and outdated cultural baggage," lamas, essentially spiritual teachers, must gain a clear understanding of modern society. Only then can they better guide those who suffer and recognise when to adapt or transcend the superficial trappings of tradition.

Many tulkus in Xizang Autonomous Region have been moving beyond the traditional constraints of their lofty role as throne-bound religious leaders. Instead, they actively embrace new forms of engagement that respond to social needs, working to benefit both society and their disciples.

In late May 2025, *ChinaReport* visited three tulkus in Lhasa, capital of Xizang, to explore how they lead efforts to promote and advance tangible and intangible religious and cultural heritage for a better reality for people today.

Building on the Past

At 78, Minyag Choekyi Gyaltsan wears a number of hats: He is chief architect of the Architectural Survey and Design Institute of Xizang Autonomous Region, deputy secretary-general of the Xizang Buddhist Association, a standing committee member of Xizang Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and a visiting lecturer of architecture at Xizang University. Most notably, he is an esteemed tulku known as Minyag Rinpoche from Kangding in Sichuan Province.

Born in Kangding in 1947, he was recognised as the 9th Minyag tulku of Kangding County's Minyag Guwa Monastery when he was just 4 years old. When he turned 11 in 1957, he travelled to Lhasa to study at Drepung Monastery in Lhasa. Meeting with *ChinaReport* at his home in downtown Lhasa, Minyag Rinpoche was dressed casually in a dark orange windbreaker. In Lhasa, where he spends most of his time, he feels more like an architect than a tulku, but when he returns to his hometown, clad in the maroon robe of a monk, he transforms into a tulku, where he is warmly received by tens of thousands of Tibetan followers.

Minyag Rinpoche shows his copy of *Chinese Tibetan Ancient Architecture (Central and Western Xizang Volume)*, an important reference work on traditional Tibetan architecture, at his home in Lhasa, Xizang, May 25, 2025 (Photo by Wang Yan)

Minyag Rinpoche recalls studying at Guwa Monastery from when he was 5 to 10 years old. His daily lessons included Tibetan grammar, rhetoric, calligraphy and studying scripture and religious rituals. "Even as a young boy at Guwa Monastery, I was fascinated by the temple's structure and I'd focus on the beams and columns of the main hall and draw their shapes on paper," he said. His enthusiasm for painting and architecture took root in early childhood.

When he arrived at Drepung Monastery, the centre of academic studies of Tibetan Buddhism, he was assigned to Loseling Dratsang, or college, for advanced studies. There he was exposed to the monastery's grand buildings, which deepened his knowledge of traditional Tibetan architecture.

In 1959, Minyag Rinpoche enrolled at Sera Primary School and in 1963, he joined a class for 11 young tulkus, where he was paid a 30 yuan (US$4) monthly stipend, quite a large sum at the time. His life became easier until the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) began, when everything was upended. He and other teenage tulkus spent seven years at a farm in Lhoka, about 150 kilometres south of Lhasa, assigned to build houses. Doing manual labour, he also worked with seasoned builders, picking up carpentry and wall-building skills. "I even learned to make adobe for house foundations, which is a rare traditional method now, where you mould mud bricks that dry in the sun," he said, adding that it is the technique used to build Lhasa's Potala Palace.

His experience during the Cultural Revolution unexpectedly expanded his architectural knowledge and set him on a different path. "Those eight years on the farm were probably more important to me than going to university for an architecture degree," he said.

In his spare time, Minyag Rinpoche improved his Chinese by reading newspapers with a dictionary. His bilingual skills in Chinese and Tibetan later opened many doors in his career.

Samye Monastery in Lhoka, Xizang Autonomous Region, August 5, 2022 (Photo by VCG)

By 1974, as the Cultural Revolution neared its end, he returned to Lhasa and was assigned to work at a construction company. The next year, Minyag Rinpoche joined a training programme for construction professionals run by the Xizang Autonomous Region Architectural Survey and Design Institute. His expertise in languages helped him stand out among the 30 students, and in 1979, the institute hired him.

As life gradually returned to normal, he faced a choice: work at the regional Buddhist Association or continue at the design institute. Committed to architecture, he chose to stay at the institute, although he never lost sight of his religious responsibilities.

In mid-1980, the Ministry of Construction commissioned a survey of ancient Tibetan structures across Xizang by experts from Xizang Autonomous Region Architectural Survey and Design Institute, giving Minyag Rinpoche a firsthand look at both the exquisite craftsmanship of ancient Tibetan builders and the structures' dilapidated states. He journeyed across the region, enduring hardships to visit most of Xizang's monasteries. Being a tulku helped a lot. This experience reignited the deep passion he had felt in childhood for preserving ancient Tibetan architecture.

"We conducted thorough surveys and created complete structural drawings for iconic sites like the Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple, Yongbulakang Palace, Sangye Monastery, the Tombs of Early Tibetan Kings and the Kumbum Stupa at Pelkor Chode Monastery," Minyag Rinpoche said. The Kumbum Stupa is particularly unique, with nine layers and nearly 77 temple halls, and 10,000 Buddha statues in halls, niches and murals. He stressed how much the survey benefits researchers, even today.

In 1987, the State allocated over 10 million yuan (US$1.4m) to restore Samye Monastery, the earliest Tibetan Buddhist temple in the region, built between 760-779. It was a pivotal project for Minyag Rinpoche's architectural career. The monastery's five-layer golden roof was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, and he was tasked with recreating the exact ancient blueprints.

He conducted painstaking research, but found only two old photos: a 1946 external panorama and a 1947 shot of the roof's exterior corner. But his experience as a tulku at monasteries proved invaluable, and to uncover internal architectural details, he visited senior lamas of the Samye Monastery for clues.

"For example, they said the distance

between the roof's outer and inner pillars was about the length of their ritual trumpets. Since I knew those instruments well, I immediately understood," Minyag Rinpoche said. He drafted dozens of floor plans, then had a scale model of the roof's main hall made so the lamas could visualise the plan. "When they saw the model, they cried and said, 'We've always dreamed of seeing the sun shine on our monastery's golden roof again in our lifetime,'" he said. Samye Monastery was soon restored to its former glory.

Over the past four decades, Minyag Rinpoche has helped restore more than 30 ancient buildings, including Tashilhunpo, Sakya, Sera, Drepung and Tsurphu monasteries. He has published architectural monographs on sites like the Jokhang Temple, Norbulingka, the Guge Kingdom Ruins and the Potala Palace. In his own words, his lifelong dedication to ancient architecture restoration and heritage preservation was predestined and a unique way to safeguard and develop Buddhism.

Though he spends most of his time in Lhasa, he feels a strong sense of responsibility to his hometown. In Kangding, he oversees five temples, including Guwa Monastery. Since the 1980s, residents have repaired the monasteries' dilapidated buildings under his guidance and with his financial support. More recently, he founded a cultural heritage protection organisation there, and using his expertise, he provides technical consulting on cultural heritage restoration and Tibetan-style architecture for locals, channelling the proceeds into local undertakings, like heritage preservation, ecological protection, education, healthcare and poverty alleviation.

Beyond architecture, he is a skilled negotiator, helping residents solve practical problems. In the early 2000s, local authorities and an energy company planned to build a hydropower station in his hometown, which would flood villagers' homes and farmland. "When authorities pressured villagers to accept relocation terms, I represented them and appealed to higher officials to halt the reservoir construction," Minyag Rinpoche said. It was a successful appeal.

"To me, Buddhism is an atheistic religion, and no one in the world, not even Sakyamuni Buddha himself can save others or determine their lives – only we can. It's like sowing and reaping: we can only attain a good next life by doing good deeds that benefit all sentient beings in this one," Minyag Rinpoche said. He emphasised that Buddhism is not idol worship, and demands no blind faith in the Buddha or anyone else. "A true Buddhist disciple should read the scriptures, for the truth lies within them," he said.

Hitting the Right Notes

Balog Tenzin Dorje, 43, known as Balog Rinpoche, is no stereotypical tulku. From a young age, he studied not only Buddhist doctrines but also Chinese, English, painting, music and other subjects. He teaches thangka painting to part-time students nationwide and leads a multi-ethnic dharma music band. With a deep, magnetic voice, he serves as the band's lead singer, chanting captivating dharma music.

Born Tenzin Dorje in 1982, he grew up in Lhasa's Norbulingka, the former summer palace of the Dalai Lama, and at age 8 was recognised as the reincarnation of the tulku of Yangrigar Monastery in Maldrogungkar County, with Balog being the lineage name of the tulkus of the monastery. Speaking in standard Chinese, he told *ChinaReport* his story. His father, he said, was also a tulku of another monastery in Xizang.

"My father worked in Norbulingka's library. After I was recognised as a tulku, he kept me home for my education instead of sending me to the monastery. Back then, the monastery had no Chinese or English teachers, and he thought modern education mattered more for a kid like me than missing out on it to only do blessings or empowerment

Balog Tenzin Dorje (front) poses with members of his band Dharma. Their music builds on Buddhist ritual musical traditions (Photo courtesy of the interviewee)

Balog Rinpoche sings with rock band Yi, Beijing, 2012 (Photo courtesy of the interviewee)

ceremonies for devotees," Balog Rinpoche said. His upbringing blended family education and formal schooling: alongside Buddhist scriptures, he took language and painting classes and joined extracurricular activities, later graduating from Xizang University with a major in thangka painting. "Looking back, I realise living in a monastery might have made me a good monk, but I wouldn't have gotten education in key things like language and culture," he said.

Balog Rinpoche is the 42nd-generation inheritor of the Songs of Milarepa, a national intangible cultural heritage listed in 2021. Since 2004, he has studied and chanted these sacred songs under the tutelage of Khenpo Dondrup, a Tibetan Buddhist master of knowledge, from Drigung Til Monastery in Lhasa's Medrogungkar County.

Milarepa (1052-1135) is still one of the most revered yogis and poets in Tibetan Buddhism's Kagyu School. His teachings, first passed down orally, were later compiled into *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* – a profound text for understanding Buddhist philosophy. Balog Rinpoche notes the *Songs of Milarepa* have been orally transmitted by Buddhist practitioners for centuries, traditionally sung solo without any simple ritual instruments like bells and drums.

He first tried promoting dharma music in a band he created in 2012: "I was teaching at Xizang Buddhism University then. Some other young tulkus and I formed a band, rehearsing dharma music in the main hall with audio equipment, and we were well-liked by teachers and students. But the band broke up when members graduated and returned to their monasteries. Still, it was a successful and meaningful experience."

Founded in 2011 in Nyetang, Chushur County, Xizang Buddhism University has trained thousands of monks and nuns to serve the Tibetan Buddhist community. Its core principle encourages harmony and exchange among teachers and students from Xizang's five religious traditions: Nyingmapa, Gelugpa, Sakyapa and Kagyupa, which are all different sects in Tibetan Buddhism, and Bon, the Tibetan indigenous religion. "We shared dharma songs from our own sects and sang together, it was a great way to learn from each other," Balog Rinpoche said.

In an August interview with China Global Television Network (CGTN), he emphasised Tibetan Buddhism's prosperity under government-supported religious policies, speaking of how the site of the university is also important in Tibetan Buddhism after Master Atisha (982-1054), an Indian Buddhist teacher and leader who travelled there in 1042. "Master Atisha travelled to Nyetang, where Xizang Buddhism University now stands, marking a golden era for Tibetan Buddhism. Over 14 years, teachers from different Buddhist traditions and staff trained many outstanding monks and nuns."

Later inspired by Nepalese artist Ani Choying Drolma's dharma music, accompanied by American guitarist Steve Tibbetts, Balog Rinpoche formed the band Dharma in 2013. Its members include guitarists, a drummer and a keyboard player, and they are multi-ethnic including people from the Mongolian, Manchu, Tibetan and Han ethnicities. According to Balog Rinpoche, the idea of involving modern musical elements into the traditional way of chanting dharma music is an attempt to attract more audiences, in particular younger people, to better disseminate the Buddhism teachings of Master Milarepa. Over the past decade, the band has performed in many cities across the country, including Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Sanya, Chongqing and Lhasa. Their soothing dharma chants have healing effects: last year, they were invited to perform twice for doctors at Shanghai's Guang Ci Memorial Hospital, drawing enthusiastic responses. "The audience's connection to our songs showed me this is a powerful way to preserve the tradition and share it more widely." To promote thangka art, he launched a painting class in 2014, welcoming students of all ages from across China. Fluent in English, he hosts weekend online Tibetan and English courses for Tibetan and Han students.

For him, Buddhism can be promoted anytime, anywhere. "Chanting Dharma music, teaching thangka painting, these are all ways to spread Buddhism," he said. Today, many tulkus have found their own paths to disseminate Buddhism and serve the public: some set up free Tibetan medical clinics, others pursue higher education, and still more pass on Buddhist teachings and traditions in monasteries.

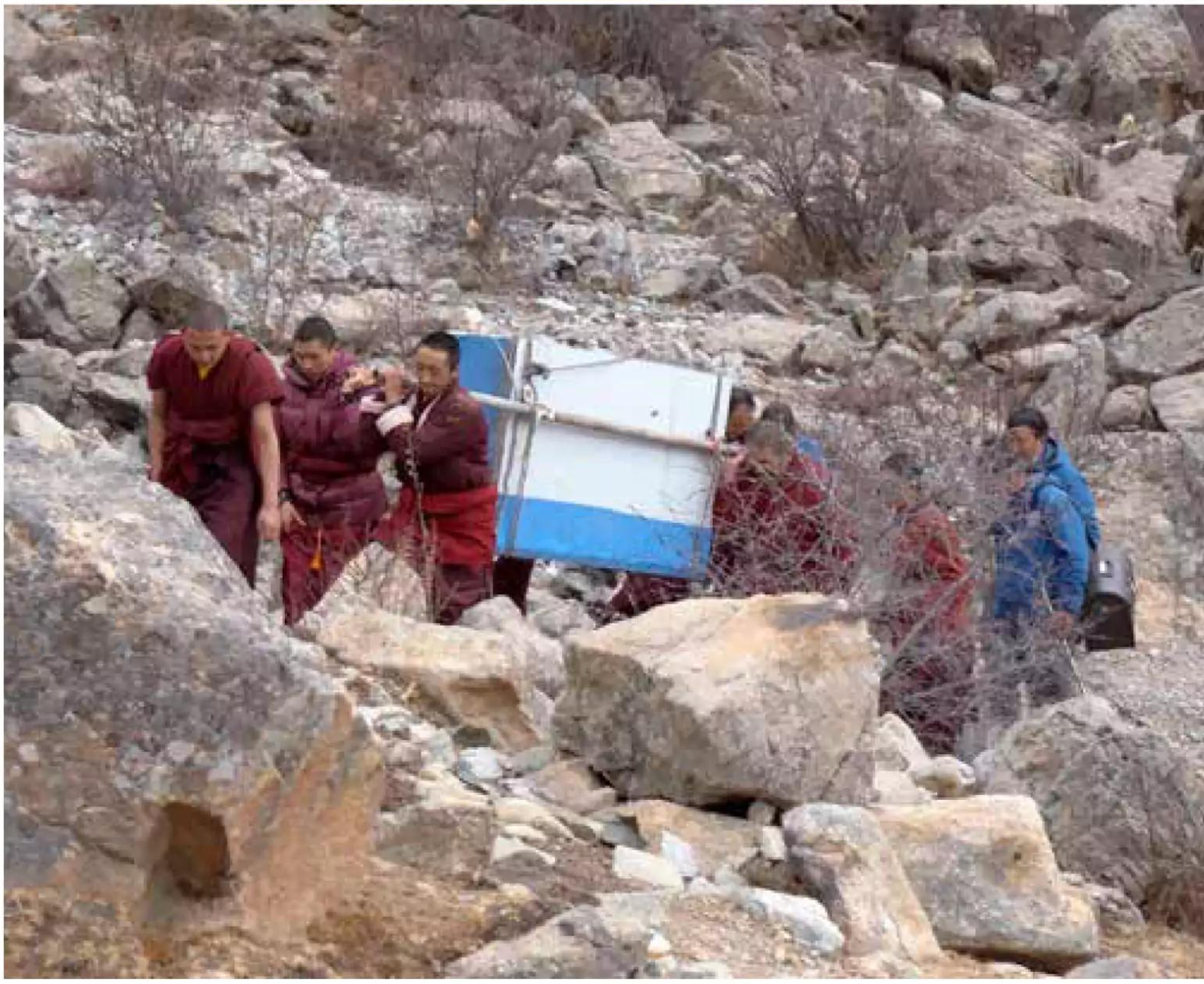
Balog Rinpoche emphasised that modernising Buddhism is a key task for young tulkus of all sects, who bear the responsibility of sharing and explaining Buddhist scriptures to the public. “These classics need to be interpreted in modern language to help believers understand them,” he said. “In the past, a full set of scriptures might be enshrined in temples as precious relics for worship. Devotees would walk beneath them seeking empowerment. We do not deny the significance of this tradition, but true empowerment comes from understanding the scriptures’ content. So in modern society, we monks must first comprehend the scriptures and practice as Buddha taught. Only then can we share their meaning, rooted in our own practice.”

“Today’s world is open, and people are exposed to diverse religions,” Balog Rinpoche said. “It is vital for everyone to stay clear-minded when choosing what to believe.”

Powering Conservation

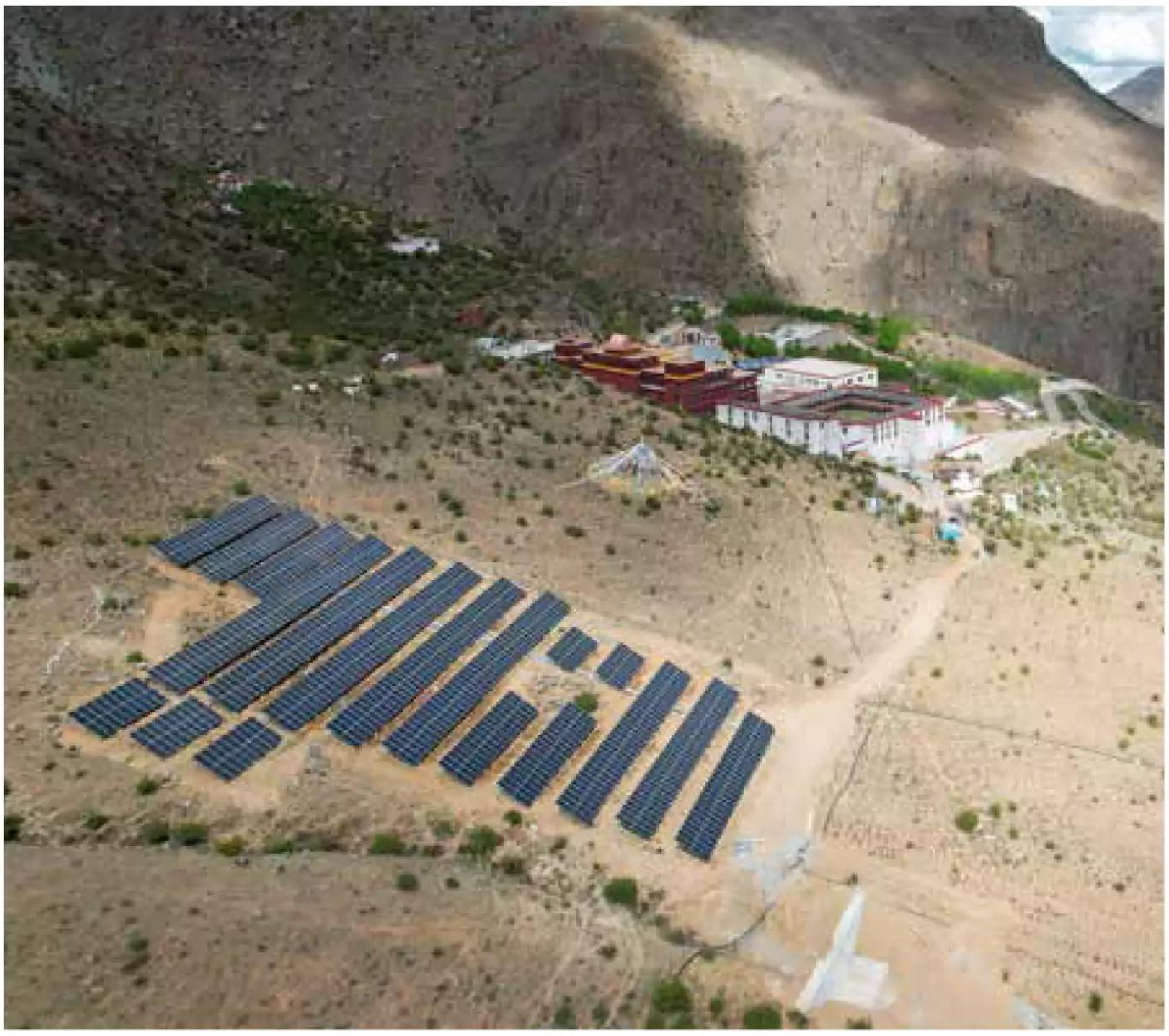
Nyenang Monastery, affiliated with the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism, lies 60 kilometres west of downtown Lhasa. More than a religious site for monks and Buddhists, it has expanded its role by establishing an ancient classics library and an intangible cultural heritage preservation centre. It collaborates with academia and universities on research related to regional history, ancient murals and the digitisation of Buddhist texts. West of the monastery stands a solar power and battery storage station that generates approximately 1 million kilowatt-hours annually.

Over the past few decades, Nyenang Monastery’s tulku – Palden Pawo



Top: Pawo Rinpoche conducts a ceremony (Photo courtesy of Nyenang Monastery)

Above: Monks carry a rescued snow leopard to be released back into the wild near Nyenang Monastery, March 2, 2025 (Photo courtesy of Nyenang Monastery)



The solar power array that generates power for Nyenang Monastery, Lhasa, Xizang, May 29, 2025 (Photo by Jiang Feibo)

Tsuglag Mawei Drayang, the 11th Pawo Rinpoche – has led monks and community members in conservation efforts, such as reforestation and wildlife monitoring. These efforts have made it the region's first zero-carbon monastery. According to Pawo Rinpoche, the storage system allows excess solar power to be saved, which powers electric vehicles for the surrounding community for free.

Pawo Rinpoche, one of the most senior figures in the Kagyu hierarchy, is a very high-ranking reincarnated tulku in Xizang. He was born in Nakchu, 300 kilometres northeast of Lhasa. In 1995, at 15 months old, he was recognised by the 17th Karmapa (Ogyen Trinley Dorje, the spiritual head of the Karma Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism) as the 11th Pawo Rinpoche, and thus became one of the heart sons of the Karmapa. Being a "heart son" refers to disciples who have a particularly close and profound spiritual connection with a tulku. In history, the Pawo Rinpoches have traditionally been recognised by the Karmapas, and the Pawo lineage extends to the 15th century. Successive Pawo Rinpoches have been both disciples and masters of the Karmapas.

Nyenang Valley, home to Nyenang Monastery, boasts a pristine natural environment and rich biodiversity. "Since I was young at the monastery, I would often hear that the nomads had spotted snow leopards," Pawo Rinpoche, dressed neatly in his monk's robe, told *ChinaReport* at the monastery's office in late May. "I even encountered one myself during my three years of seclusion in a mountain cave."

In 2021, Pawo Rinpoche invited the Beijing-based community conservation NGO Shan Shui Conservation Centre to conduct wildlife monitoring and research in the valley. Camera traps captured images of snow leopards and other animals. He launched the Nyenang Ecological and Cultural Conservation Centre (NECCC) in 2023, hiring conservation professionals and recruiting volunteers from across China to run it.

According to NECCC staff member Liu Tao, alpine areas around the monastery are critical habitats for species like the snow leopard. In early 2023, the Xizang government approved the Nyenang Valley Natural Protection Community, a unique grassroots protected area in China. "Our protection community now covers over 50 square kilometres, with around 40 camera traps," Liu said. "Up to now, we've documented seven national first-class protected animal species, including snow leopards, alpine musk deer and brown bears, 14 national second-class protected animal species and over 200 plant species. From camera trap footage, we've identified 13 snow leopards in total, with two adults and three cubs confirmed as permanent residents here."

Backed by the monastery's material and personnel support, a community-led conservation network has been established across seven nearby villages, engaging some 2,000 residents including nomads and farmers. "We've contracted 10 forest rangers from these seven villages to assist our centre with monitoring, data collection and anti-poaching efforts," Liu said. These are local men and women aged between 20 and 50. The centre regularly invites wildlife and environmental experts to train residents, equipping them with knowledge to become eco-tourism guides in the future.

In March 2024, a nomad found an injured snow leopard with broken bones after a cliff fall, and notified monks at Nyenang Monastery. Pawo Rinpoche and other monks rushed to the scene and arranged for the leopard to be safely transported to Chushur Wildlife Rescue Centre. Named Tsiring Nana, Tibetan for "benevolent goddess of auspiciousness,"the leopard received professional treatment and miraculously survived. Media coverage of the case drew nationwide attention.

A year later, as Tsiring Nana

recovered, her future remained uncertain. Her right forelimb was completely shattered, so Pawo Rinpoche invited experts from other parts of China to perform surgery. Once she improved, the monastery hoped to release her back to the wild, but every conservation professional warned she would not survive. Chushur Rescue Centre also proposed keeping her for breeding. “Our original goal was wildlife conservation, but this approach is emotionally hard for us Buddhists to accept,” Pawo Rinpoche said. “She is a free being, thus she shouldn’t be caged without dignity, used by humans as a breeding tool. That’s unfair and disrespectful to life.”

After negotiating with the forestry and grassland bureau, the monastery decided to try releasing her. That day, they chanted sutras to bless her. Luckily, Tsiring Nana was captured on camera traps two weeks later, healthier and stronger than before.

“This proves snow leopards and other wildlife can fend for themselves in the wild,” Pawo Rinpoche said. “It also made me realise this moment, in a way, reveals a misunderstanding many of us hold: We long for freedom, yet when faced with choosing it, we’re filled with fear. What’s more, we often imagine freedom as something external, something distant – but it’s not. Freedom is a state of the present, a choice we make in our current circumstances. More often than not, it’s a choice we can make for ourselves. Similarly, if you’re weighed down by doubts, expectations or hesitation, you can’t truly enjoy freedom. Only when you’re bold and resolute, when you dare to make your own choices, can you grasp and savour it.”

The monastery does not merely protect snow leopards. The 13 snow leopards in the valley are the Dharma Protectors that safeguard the monastery’s serenity, Pawo Rinpoche said. In 2003, a mining company wanted to operate nearby. But thanks to the snow leopards, no mining activities were permitted.

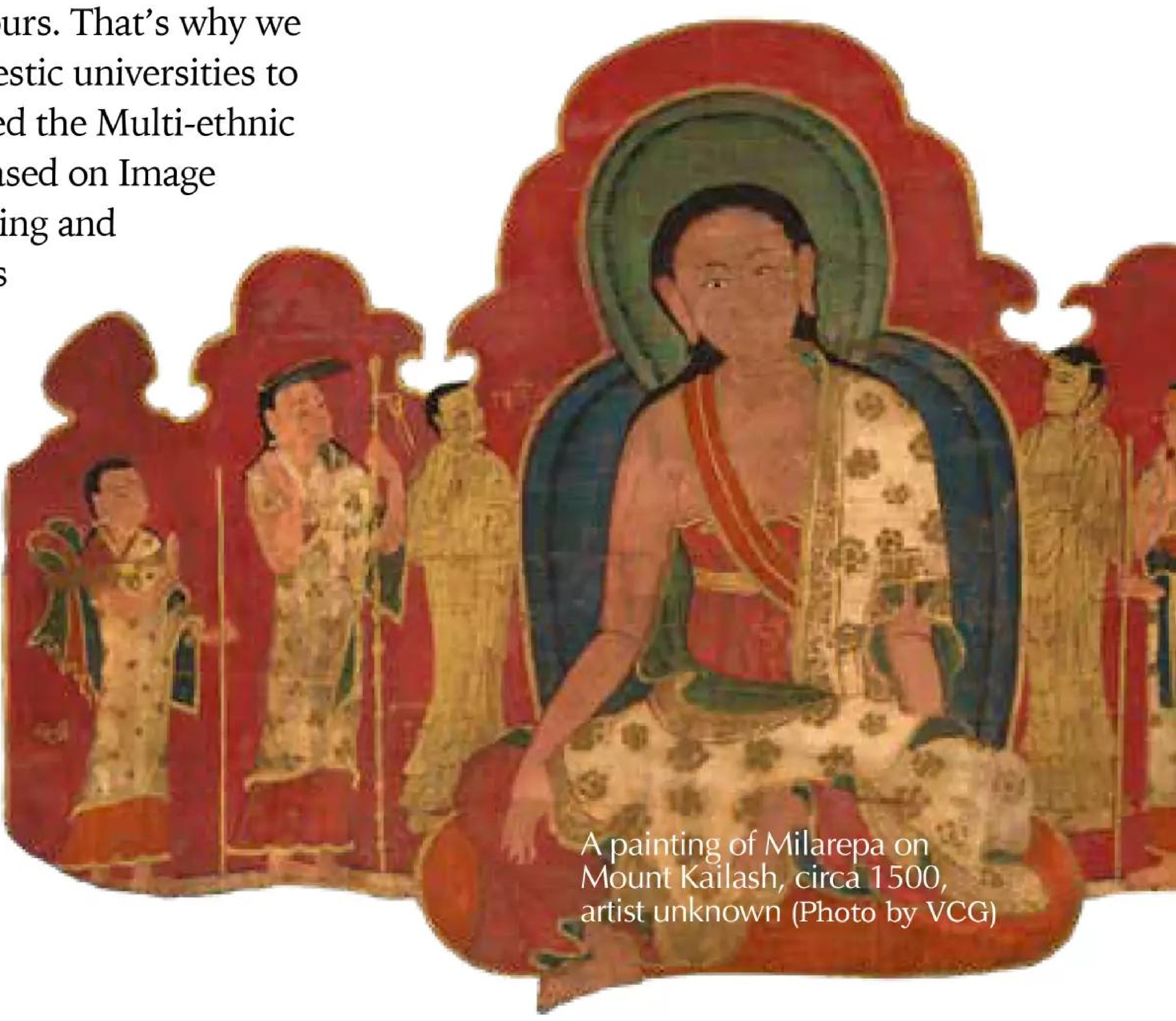
Amid societal changes, Nyenang Monastery has embraced new endeavours, from cultural preservation and education to healthcare, while prioritizing environmental protection initiatives. Above all, under Pawo Rinpoche’s guidance, the monastery has never strayed from its core tradition: authentic practice and strict self-discipline.

In 2016, the monastery established an ancient texts compilation group to collect Kagyu School-related ancient books and documents. By 2020, they had successfully gathered nearly 1,000 texts, Pawo Rinpoche noted. Beyond collaborating on research with academic institutions, including the Renmin University of China in Beijing, Zhejiang University and Sichuan University, the monastery has also published some of these materials, many of which had never been studied before outside the monastery.

“Overseas institutions like the University of Vienna once dominated Kagyu School research,” Pawo Rinpoche said. “But our roots are in China, so our academic research and its rightful voice should be ours. That’s why we partnered with domestic universities to launch a project called the Multi-ethnic Exchange History Based on Image Texts of the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties. This project breaks new ground by integrating academic and monastic perspectives. Historically, academia led such work, providing frameworks and evidence. For us monks, participating in researching and exploring our history is key to building cultural identity and confidence to create mutual verification and advancement for both circles.”

For over 700 years since it was founded, Nyenang Monastery has been a hub for authentic Buddhist practice: monks uphold the Vinaya, or Buddhist monastic code, follow the Buddha’s teachings, progress through practice stages, and strive to restrain desires and subdue inner afflictions. “This tradition has weathered countless historical changes,” Pawo Rinpoche said. “To this day, our greatest pride is that it remains intact. That’s precisely why Tibetan Buddhism has not only taken root in Xizang over the past millennium, but also thrived and been passed down through generations.”

“Today, many see Tibetan Buddhism as ancient wisdom rooted in long-held traditions. Yet we often overlook a key fact: For most of history, it was more than a guardian of wisdom – it was a leader and driving force of civilisation on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, and for long stretches, a pioneer in shaping its cultural landscape,” Pawo Rinpoche said.★



A painting of Milarepa on Mount Kailash, circa 1500, artist unknown (Photo by VCG)

Medicine

Making the Cut

As more young Chinese undergo double-eyelid surgery and other cosmetic procedures for an extra leg-up right out of secondary school, experts warn of the potential physical and mental health risks they may face

By Hu Kexin

A woman undergoes double-eyelid surgery in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, May 21, 2024 (Photo by VCG)

Lin Yue, 18, said she had wanted to get botox injections for a long time.

Classmates in secondary school had nicknamed her "squareface" for her broad jawbone muscles, which made her face appear very angular.

"I felt inferior for all my years in secondary school because of my face shape and it affected my grades," Lin told *ChinaReport*.

She avoided braiding her hair to hide her jawline. She once glued her hair to her cheeks to stop the wind blowing it around. So, soon after taking the national university entrance exam (*gaokao*) in June, she paid 1,600 yuan (US$230) for botox at the People's Hospital of Zhengzhou in Henan Province.

A growing number of secondary school students like Lin are marking their completion of the high-stress exam with cosmetic procedures, often as graduation gifts from their parents to start university with a new look.

Experts note that parents have become more accepting of their children getting work done, with some having had minor nips and tucks themselves. But they caution that for younger patients, it is crucial to assess suitability and resist both overhyped advertising and online-driven body anxiety.

Looks Matter

At the Ninth People's Hospital Shanghai under Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the number of students seeking medical cosmetology after the *gaokao* has been growing. Many parents book appointments for their children way before the exam.

"Our department receives more than 100 patients a day, with two peak periods, right after the exam ends, and again after the scores are released," Yang Jun, chief of plastic and reconstructive surgery at the hospital, told *ChinaReport*.

The number of secondary school grads visiting beauty clinics has steadily increased over the past five years, said Cui Haiyan, chief of plastic and reconstructive surgery at Shanghai Tongji Hospital of Tongji University. "After being freed from their intense secondary school studies, many students hope to start university with a new look. For them, cosmetic surgery has become a symbolic coming-of-age gift," he said.

A survey conducted in August by *China Youth Daily* of 1,341 university students, 26 percent of them incoming freshmen, found that 71.9 percent had peers who underwent cosmetic procedures. According to a 2025 report by market research firm iResearch, China's medical cosmetology market grew 21.3 percent year-on-year in 2024 to reach 379 billion yuan (US$54.1b). Consumers aged 18 to 22 accounted for the largest growth, making up 28.5 percent of total clients, 5.7 percent higher than in 2023.

Yang Jun said some families take children for treatments to celebrate high exam scores, while others whose children performed poorly hope an improved appearance may give them an edge elsewhere.

In Zhuzhou, Hunan Province, Liu Wanqi said she spent more than 3,000 yuan (US$429) on double-eyelid surgery at a private clinic, escorted by her mother. "My whole family supported me," she said.

In Guangzhou, student Chen Ranran recalled that before the 2024 *gaokao*, her mother had paid 20,000 yuan (US$2,857) for her to do a non-surgical nose job involving hyaluronic acid injections, another popular procedure among teens. Like botox, it is not permanent and requires follow-up injections every six months to one year. "My mum also frequently gets electrotherapy skin treatments at the same clinic," she said.

Chen Youbai, deputy director of plastic and reconstructive surgery at the Chinese PLA General Hospital in Beijing, shared another case: "Five years ago, I performed jaw surgery on a mother. This year, she brought her daughter in for the same procedure after she finished the *gaokao*. The girl was already very pretty, but her mother insisted her jawline was too wide."

Not all parents agree. Lin Yue, for example, did not tell her parents about her botox injections until afterward because they were opposed to her getting them.

A *ChinaReport* reporter visited several private clinics in Beijing posing as a parent and was told that anyone aged 18 or older may undergo plastic surgery without parental consent.

Caution Urged

Experts stress the importance of careful pre-screening. Yang Jun said plastic surgery should only be recommended for "obvious defects or congenital issues." For other cases, doctors assess necessity first before

美容成形　美容中医
自助服务区
自助服务区
Patients wait to be called for a plastic surgery procedure, Peking University Third Hospital, July 14, 2025 (Photo by Hu Kexin)

creating tailored treatment plans.

"Some students expect too much, influenced by online advertising," Yang said. "But looks can only be refined within the limits of a person's natural features." Procedures for wider eyes and narrower, more prominent noses are some of the most popular among young Chinese. "It is unrealistic, for example, for an Asian face to be surgically reshaped into European features. Such surgeries can even cause complications."

Yang added that many young people are swayed by trends, such as preferring double eyelids over subtler infold eyelids to make their eyes appear wider, without considering whether these suit their facial structure or lifestyle.

"It's naive to blindly believe that European-like outer double eyelids are always beautiful," he said. "For women who like make-up, they may have their double eyelids wider, while for those who don't like make-up, double eyelids that are too wide may seem unnatural."

"The double-eyelid surgery may help single-eyelid men with issues like false crossed eyes or droopy eyelids, but for those who look fine with single eyelids, it isn't always suitable," he added.

Wang Yongqian, vice president of the Plastic Surgery Hospital at the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, agrees. "Doctors must assess the aesthetic effect of surgery," he said. "For example, eye width should match aesthetic standards. If a student demands eyes wider than that, the physician should dissuade them."

Ad Space

Doctors warn that many cosmetic surgery ads mislead young people. "Trends like ears that appear more 'elven' (by making them protrude and face forward) and larger, innocent-looking eyes do not align with healthy aesthetics. Such fads are short-lived," Wang Yongqian said.

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SHANGHAI 2025/6/24-26
GUANGZHOU 2025/9/04-06
BEIJING 2025/10/29-31
INDONESIA 2025/10/31-11/0
美团·美容
美业好生意，美团来帮忙
FAST FOOD
Area B Hall 9.1-13.1

People attend the opening of the 66th China International Beauty Expo, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, March 10, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

Chen Youbai pointed out that many social media posts about plastic surgery are not created by real patients but produced by marketing teams and cosmetic beauty centres.

Liu Wanqi said that when she underwent double-eyelid surgery, her doctor offered to deduct 500 yuan (US$71) from the bill if she allowed her surgery photos to be used in advertisements.

Similarly, Chen Ranran said she once posted online about photorejuvenation, a procedure which uses gentle pulses of broad-spectrum light to improve skin tone and texture.

But in reality, she had only undergone a non-surgical nose job. "To make it look real, I tried some photorejuvenation treatments at the hospital mainly for posing and taking photos. They paid me 300 yuan for the post, which promoted a public hospital in Guangzhou," she said.

A physician at a public hospital, who asked not to be named, told *ChinaReport* that most cosmetic surgeries are not covered by public health insurance, meaning fees are essentially pure profit. "That's one reason why some clinics and hospitals pay for promotional posts," he said.

But Chen Youbai cautioned against believing exaggerated claims in ads. "No surgery is truly non-invasive. Most involve cutting the skin," he said. Cui Haiyan added: "This is why patients should only go to licensed clinics with qualified doctors."

Chen has treated patients who suffered complications from unlicensed clinics. "Some came in with infections from anti-ageing injections. These products work by stimulating chronic inflammation to boost collagen, but reactions vary. Some patients develop nodules or granulomas. Licensed

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FAST FOOD

hospitals carefully control dosage, but unlicensed clinics often misuse injections for profit," he said.

Even non-surgical treatments such as photoelectric therapies and injections carry risks of allergies, rashes, scarring or dermatitis.

Cao Xi, a recent secondary school grad in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, said she went to a private clinic for a chemical peel advertised as a cure for acne. "The results were disappointing. In the end, my pimples cleared up with medicine prescribed by a public hospital," she said.

'Spotlight Effect'

Experts say the rise in youth cosmetic procedures is closely tied to beauty anxiety fuelled by social media, especially among young women. Online videos and posts often promote ideals of being fair-skinned, slim and youthful, with big eyes and a pointed chin becoming the standard for attractiveness.

In the *China Youth Daily* survey, 50 percent of respondents believed students underwent cosmetic procedures due to online influencers, 49.1 percent cited advertising, 48.5 percent wanted a new look for university, and 45.8 percent said it reflected society's overemphasis on appearance.

For Liu Wanqi, beauty anxiety began in secondary school. "People told me to open my eyes wider in photos. Even my mother once said I would resemble her more if I had bigger eyes. Since then, I was determined to get double-eyelid surgery," she said.

Cao Xi agreed that beauty anxiety is widespread among classmates. "Social media and peer comparison make it worse," she said.

Lu Zheng, a psychiatrist at Tongji Hospital, confirmed the trend. "In the past three years, many secondary school students, mostly girls, have sought help from our department due to beauty anxiety," he said.

He shared the case of a secondary schooler who developed severe anxiety about her appearance. "She was so self-conscious about her single eyelids and thick lips that she avoided school and social interaction, spending hours staring in the mirror instead. She even considered postponing taking the *gaokao* to undergo surgery."

After a psychological evaluation, Lu diagnosed her with depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and neurasthenia – a general term describing nervous exhaustion that is outdated in the West.

"It took three months of treatment before she returned to school," he said.

A Beijing secondary school student, who asked to remain anonymous, told *ChinaReport*: "Good looks do help in job hunting and social interactions. Love of beauty is human nature. Online videos teaching people how to look prettier definitely influence us. Many of my classmates buy whitening products, and some even talk about anti-ageing. I care a lot about skin whitening myself."

But Cui Haiyan stressed that such trends are misleading. "We do not recommend anti-ageing treatments for 18-year-olds. Over-treating the skin can damage its natural protective barrier, which is difficult to restore," he said.

Interviewed experts stressed the necessity to evaluate whether young people seeking cosmetic surgery are struggling with psychological issues such as anxiety or depression. Ideally, they should receive a mix of psychological and medical treatment, though this is still rare in China.

Lu said some patients even undergo repeated surgeries on the same feature, which may signal deeper psychological problems.

Wang warned against multiple operations on the same body part. "Every surgery damages the original structure, making future corrections harder and increasing the risk of hypertrophic scars," he said.

Lin Yue reflected on her own experience: "Looking back, my anxiety was unnecessary. Most students care more about studies. But a single joke can make you feel like everyone is staring at your flaw. It's the spotlight effect that worsens the anxiety."

The *China Youth Daily* survey found that nearly 65 percent of respondents agreed that "youthful energy is naturally beautiful" and "does not need touch-ups."

Cao now believes healthier lifestyle choices are the better path. "A balanced diet, regular exercise and good habits are more scientific and economical ways to improve appearance and self-confidence. They also build self-discipline," she said.★

Lin Yue, Liu Wanqi, Chen Ranran, and Cao Xi are pseudonyms

New Energy

Green for Miles

Government subsidies and lower operating costs are driving rapid adoption of new energy heavy-duty lorries in China, though limited range, slow charging and high up-front costs are still bumps in the road

By Chen Huaishan

Lorries are parked in the logistics area of the Shanghai Lingang Free Trade Zone, April 20, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

In the past few years, China's new energy vehicle (NEV) market has experienced exponential growth. NEVs, which include electric vehicles, plug-in hybrid vehicles and a negligible share of fuel cell vehicles (mainly hydrogen), accounted for about 41 percent of new passenger vehicle sales in 2024, cementing China's position as the world leader in NEV adoption. In the first nine months of 2025, the figure further rose to 52 percent, according to China Automobile Dealers Association.

By comparison, the shift has been far slower in the freight vehicle sector. Although sales of new energy lorries have picked up, their transition still lags well behind that of passenger cars. In 2023, the penetration rate of new energy commercial vehicles (the ratio of the unit of new energy commercial vehicles to the total unit of commercial vehicles sold) reached about 11 percent, with only 6 percent for lorries. In the first eight months of 2025, the penetration rate rose to 25 percent, with 23 percent for lorries, much lower than the 45.5 percent for all new energy autos, according to China Association of Automobile Manufactures.

The central government has long considered energy transition of freight vehicle as an environmental and economic necessity, especially as freight vehicles are a major source of pollutants in China. According to a report released by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment in March, freight lorries accounted for 83.7 percent of nitrogen oxide emissions from all road vehicles in 2023, with heavy-duty models alone accounting for 75.7 percent.

Roadside Assistance

Reducing emissions from freight vehicles is a major component of the country's efforts to deliver its dual carbon pledge: to peak emissions by 2030 and achieve neutrality by 2060. Given China's status as the world's largest lorry market, a successful transition to new energy can consolidate China's position as the world's leading battery and electric vehicle technology leader.

This is why the government launched a new programme in 2024 to boost the development of new energy lorries, offering cash subsidies to owners willing to replace their China III and IV emissions-rated diesel lorries – standards phased in from 2014-2015 and December 2022 respectively – with cleaner models. Purchase tax exemptions for new energy lorries were extended until 2027.

In May 2024, the State Council, China's cabinet, released the 2024-2025 Energy Conservation and Carbon Reduction Action Plan, which pledged wider adoption of new energy lorries and the rollout of zero-emission freight fleets, aiming to cut the transportation sector's carbon intensity by 5 percent from 2020 levels by the end of 2025.

Building on national plans, local governments have launched their own initiatives. Beijing municipal government has created "zero-emission freight zones" that cover most of its urban areas, where only electric or hydrogen lorries may enter during the day. In Shanghai, a stricter emissions policy has helped to retire nearly one-third of its China IV diesel lorries. In Shandong Province, a logistics hub, the provincial government enlisted its State-owned fleets to lead by example, buying hundreds of electric lorries even before the subsidies rolled out.

According to mandatory insurance registration data, sales of new energy heavy-duty lorries in China hit 82,000

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A man charges an electric lorry at a charging station, Zhengzhou, Henan Province, September 3, 2019 (Photo by VCG)

units in 2024, up 140 percent year-on-year, with the penetration rate climbing steadily from 10.7 percent at the start of the year to 21.9 by December. For the full year, NEVs accounted for 13.61 percent of total heavy-lorry sales, more than double the 5.6 percent share in 2023.

In 2025, the central government doubled down on greening the freight sector. On March 18, the Ministry of Transport, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Finance issued a notice on scrapping and renewing old lorries. The programme, which runs through December 31, 2025, targets the retirement of China III and IV emission-standard vehicles, encouraging operators to replace them with China VI or new energy models.

On top of the 95,000 yuan (US$13,000) scrappage subsidy, the programme offers additional purchase incentives for new energy lorries, bringing total support to as much as 140,000 yuan (US$19,000) per vehicle.

Other governments quickly followed. By the end of May 28, provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities had initiated or upgraded their own incentives. Shanghai stands out with the most generous package – lorry buyers there can receive up to 280,000 yuan (US$38,000) in combined subsidies.

Taking Charge

The policy has clearly fuelled the surge in new energy lorry sales. According to industry publication *China Automotive News*, registrations of new energy heavy-duty lorries reached 82,200 in the first seven months of 2025, up 191 percent from the same period in 2024. In June, their market penetration climbed to 26.1 percent, more than doubling 2024's year-end figure of 13.6 percent.

In certain subcategories, electric lorries now dominate the market. In Q1 2025, electric vehicles already outsold diesel models among newly sold tractor lorries. Natural gas lorries took the top spot, followed by electric lorries and diesel lorries. Among newly sold dump lorries and mixers, electric vehicles now account for more than half of sales.

In response to the market boom, major lorry manufacturers have scrambled to increase their investment and production capacity. State-owned giants like FAW Jiefang and Sinotruk have launched new electric model series. Startups like DeepWay, backed by Baidu, and Farizon, a brand under automaker Geely, are experimenting with lighter frames and semi-autonomous features. Battery leader CATL is testing sodium-ion packs that promise longer range at lower cost, and hydrogen fuel stacks for long-distance freight.

A marketing executive at a new energy heavy-duty manufacturer told *ChinaReport* that the company is currently mass-producing 49-ton lorry models equipped with 600 kWh and 400 kWh battery packs, which were launched in May last year. Last year, the company signed just 25 dealers. This year, that number has grown to 65. The firm's annual shipment target is 1,500 vehicles, compared with roughly 300 units delivered in 2024.

According to Chen Jianhua, director of the Energy Foundation China's transportation programme, the recent policy has significantly narrowed the price gap between new energy lorries and diesel models.

Chen told *ChinaReport* that for a 49-ton lorry, diesel models can sell for as low as around 400,000 yuan (US$56,000), while fully electric models range from 500,000-700,000 yuan (US$70,000-98,100), 20 to 50 percent higher. With government subsidies, however, the price advantage of diesel lorries has been considerably reduced.

Chen estimates that the operating costs of new energy lorries are 15 to 40 percent lower than those of diesel models. In energy-rich areas such as Shaanxi Province and Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in the country's northwest, where electricity is particularly cheap, the savings can amount to several thousand US dollars per lorry each year. On top of that, new energy lorries generally incur much lower maintenance expenses than their diesel counterparts, adding to their appeal.

Turn Ahead

Despite their lower operating and maintenance costs, new energy lorries still lag behind diesel models in terms of driving range and other features.

A worker assembles a lorry at a new-energy auto plant, Gui'an, Guizhou Province, July 2, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

"On a single charge, the operating range of most new energy lorries is typically between 200 and 300 kilometres," Chen said, "The gap compared with diesel lorries is significant, especially in cold weather, when range drops further due to battery performance and heating demands."

According to Hu Yiting, chairman of Shandong Binzhou Transport Group, which has converted half of its 600 lorries into new energy models, new energy lorries have proven their economic value on short, fixed routes, like at ports and steel plants. "But for long-haul operations, challenges remain, though the gap is gradually closing," Hu said.

Charging is a major hurdle. Most public stations are designed for passenger vehicles and cannot accommodate lorries.

Even lorry-accessible stations typically rely on 120-240 kilowatt chargers, far below what heavy-duty batteries require. With average battery packs around 300 kWh, a full charge can take up to an hour. Even with the increasingly available ultra-fast 480 kW chargers, the process still takes about 30 minutes, much longer than refuelling a diesel lorry, Chen said.

This is why diesel lorries still dominate China's interior, where long distances and sparse infrastructure make new energy models less attractive, while subsidies and short-distance logistics demand are driving growing adoption of electric lorries in ports.

These challenges have led to a debate between building more charging stations and battery swapping. Instead of going to charging stations, a lorry can go to dedicated depots where drivers can change out depleted battery packs for full ones in under five minutes. This approach has become more popular in niche markets for mines, ports and construction firms.

But for many independent diesel lorry drivers, the rapid expansion of new energy lorries poses a threat rather than an opportunity. Given the economic slowdown, China's freight industry has already faced intense cutthroat competition in recent years, with falling freight rates squeezing profit margins.

Many lorry drivers are concerned that given their lower operation and maintenance costs, the massive adoption of new energy lorries could push rates down further, eventually making diesel lorries unprofitable.

Currently, the adoption of new energy lorries is mostly driven by freight companies, which have more financial resources and stronger cost-control capabilities. Individual owner-operators often lack the capital to replace their vehicles.

According to an August 2023 survey conducted by the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing, about 78.2 percent of China's lorry drivers are independent operators, most of whom own their vehicles. About half are still repaying lorry loans.

Zhang Yang, a driver from Henan Province, is among them. Zhang told *ChinaReport* that drivers will work until they have recovered their initial investment before considering a switch to new energy.

"Much of the trucking industry is still taking a wait-and-see attitude towards new energy lorries," Chen Jianhua said, citing concerns over cost efficiency, driving range and charging convenience.

Chen said the intense competition in China's transport sector drives operators to push vehicles to their limits to recover investments quickly. At present, recouping investment in new energy lorries still takes longer, which means broader adoption will depend on continued government subsidies and advances in battery and charging technology.

"The trend towards electrification is clear, but the true turning point has yet to arrive," Chen said.★

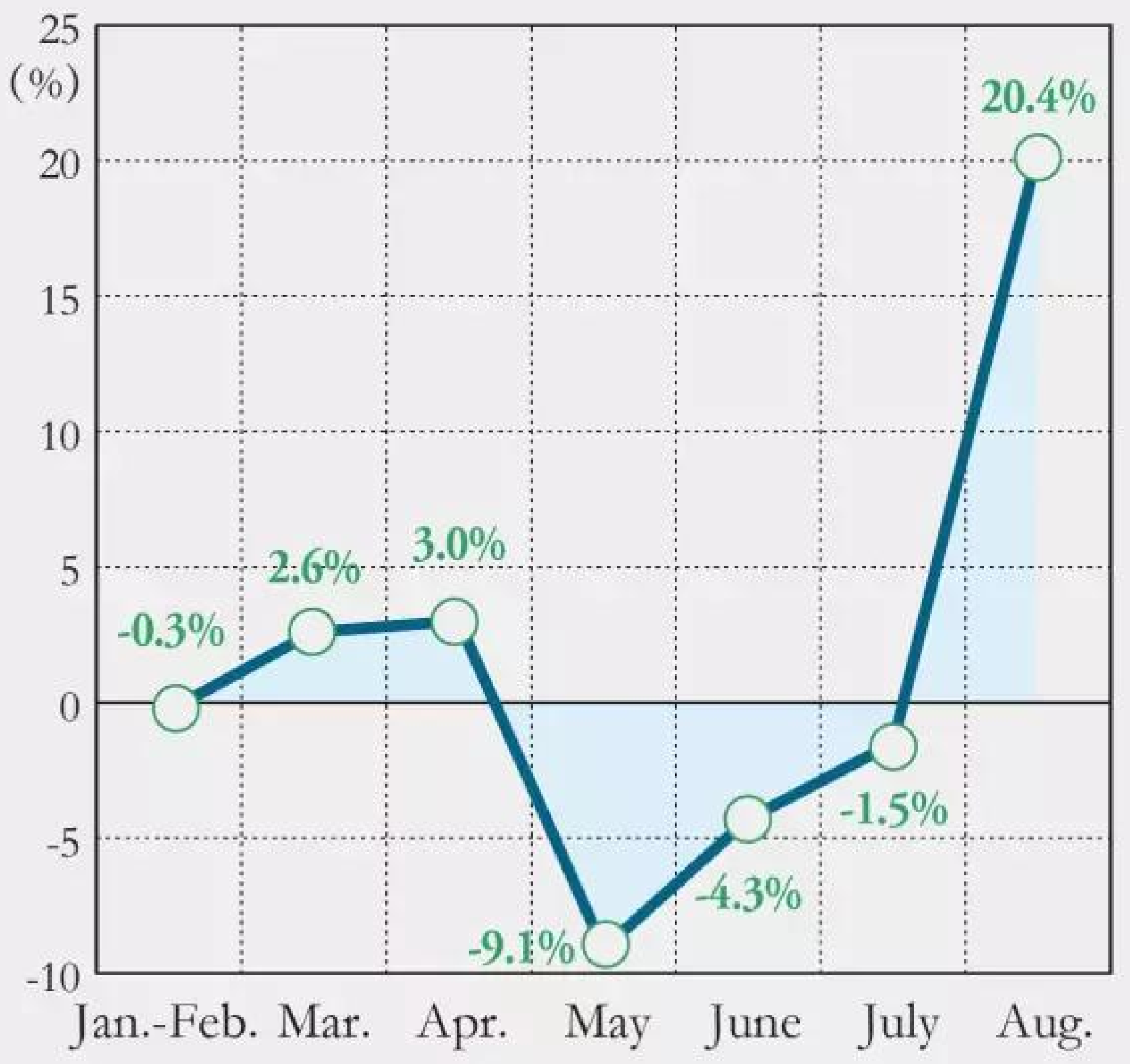
China By Numbers

20.4%

Year-on-year increase in the profit of industrial enterprises above designated size (with annual revenue over US$2.8m) in August, the biggest growth since December 2023

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China

Year-on-year change in the profit of industrial enterprises above designated size between January and August 2025

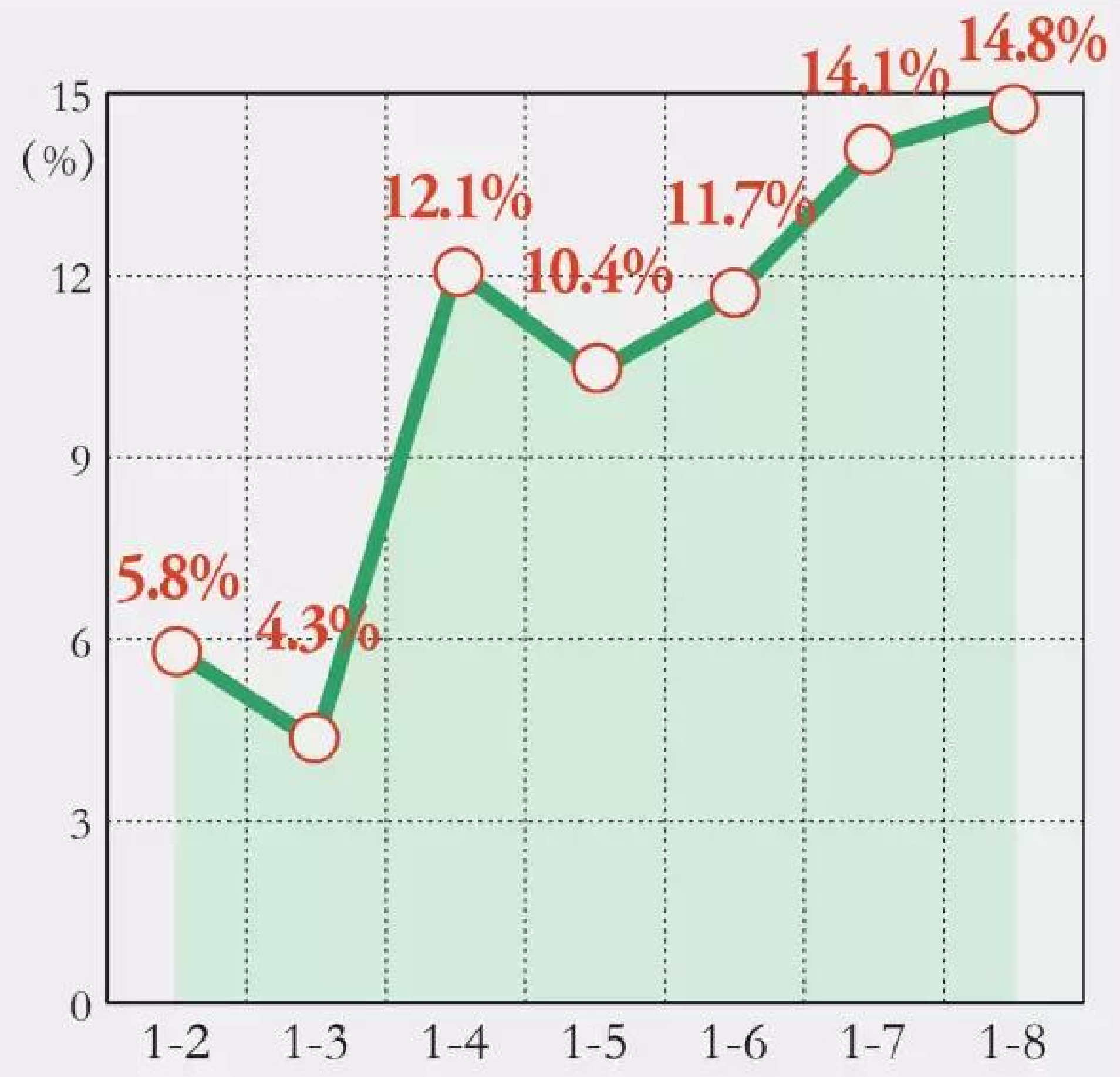


14.8%

Year-on-year rise in the number of foreign-funded enterprises established in the first eight months of 2025, totalling 42,435

Source: Ministry of Commerce of China

Year-on-year growth in the number of foreign-invested enterprises established between January and August 2025



US$32.3 trillion

China's total social logistics volume in the first eight months of 2025

Source: China Federation of Logistics & Purchasing

4.4 percent

Year-on-year rise in China's port cargo throughput between January and August, totalling 12.03 billion tons

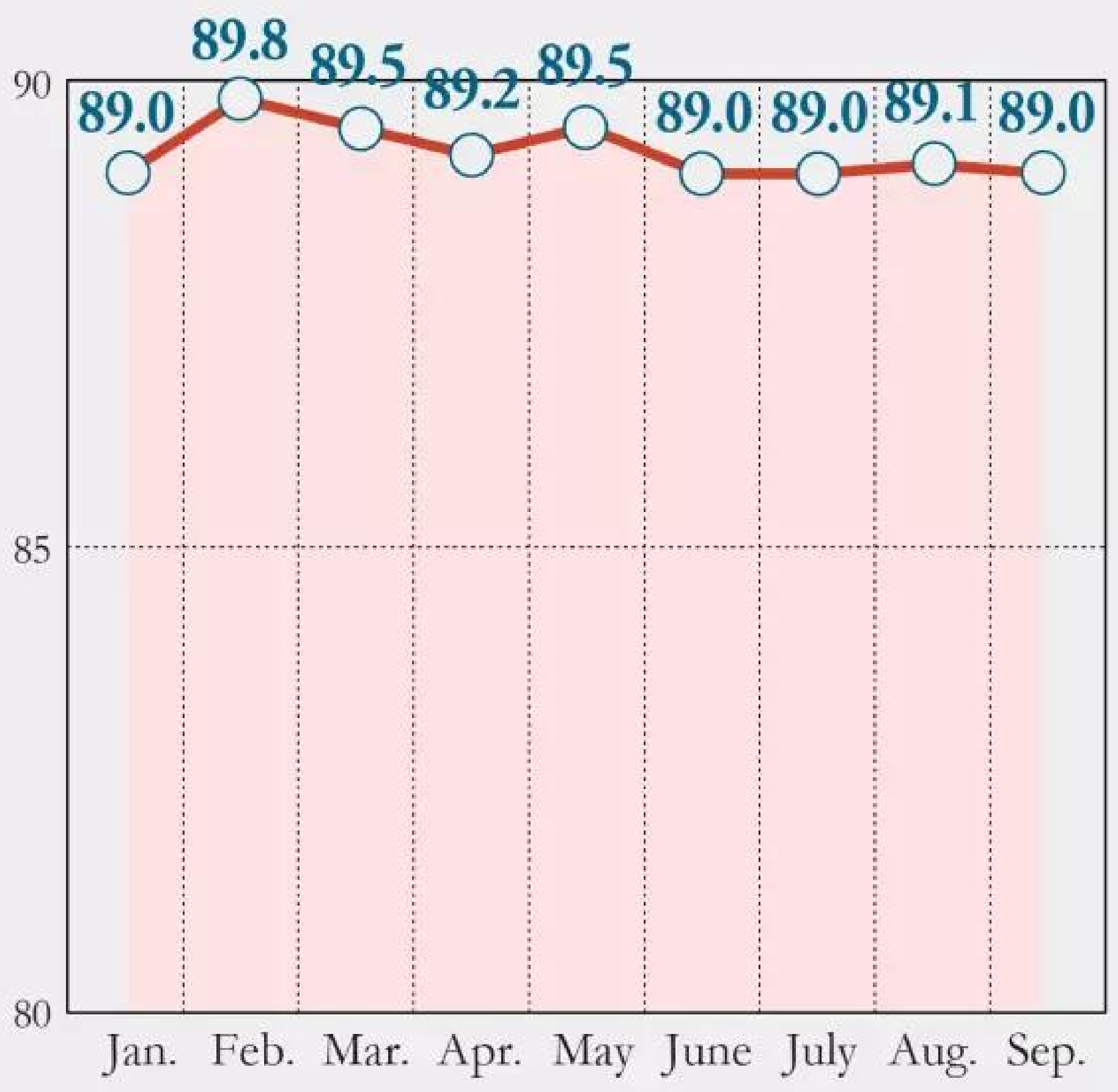
Source: Ministry of Transport of China

51.9%

The Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) Export Index (which serves as a barometer to reflect the overall export performance of SMEs) in August, marking expansion for 17 months in a row

Source: Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of China / China Association of Small and Medium Enterprises

China's SME development index between January and September 2025



Film

King of Comedy

Renowned comedian Chen Peisi's film *The Stage* has garnered acclaim for its exploration of when art conflicts with power. However, some question whether its underlying bawdiness is suitable for the modern age

By Yi Ziyi

It was Chinese New Year's Eve in 1984. People across China were glued to the television *Spring Festival Gala,* one of China's most influential shows presented by China Central Television (CCTV). Annually broadcast on Chinese New Year's Eve, the show was initially launched in 1983. The next year, CCTV's *Spring Festival Gala* offered something more than songs and dances.

To the sounds of a nation laughing out loud, 30-year-old Chen Peisi and his partner Zhu Shimao presented a groundbreaking skit called "Eating Noodles." In the 18-minute sketch, Chen played a nameless extra vying for a tiny part in a film. As the director's demands became more extreme, Chen struggled to eat bowls of noodles one after another. The comic noodle-eater rose to fame overnight.

Chen and Zhu's sketch was so influential that it became a genre of comedy in its own right – known as the "CCTV *Spring Festival Gala* sketch." It had a tremendous influence on both comedians and audiences. From 1984 to 1998, Chen and Zhu performed 11 sketches at the annual galas, helping to bring in a laughter-filled New Year's Eve.

This year, the 71-year-old has returned to the big screen after 32 years, directing and starring in an adaptation of his satirical stage comedy *The Stage,* which was first performed in 2015. Set in the 1930s during the Republic of China (1912-1949), a turbulent period plagued by warlords, *The Stage* revolves

A scene from *The Stage*

Chen Peisi (left) performs in his satirical stage comedy *The Stage*, Tianjin, August 24, 2019 (Photo by VCG)

around a Peking Opera troupe as they are forced to change their cast and content by a threatening and boorish warlord.

Released on July 25, the dark comedy had taken in over 404 million yuan (US$56.4m) by August 26. The film earned plaudits but also drew criticism, especially for its depictions of gender. It epitomises Chen's comedy philosophy: At the heart of comedy, there lies tragedy.

New Comic Genre

Born in 1954 in Changchun, Jilin Province, Chen was always interested in acting, influenced by his father, Cheng Qiang, one of China's most famous film villains and a pioneer of China's film industry.

Chen made his acting debut in the 1979 feature film *What a Family*, the first comedy film made after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). He plays Hu Jiaqi, a young dramatic actor who falls in love with a saleswoman at a bookshop. His father, Chen Qiang, performed Jiaqi's father, Hu senior, a diligent and old-fashioned manager at a woolen mill.

From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, Chen and his father appeared together in several famous comedy films about ordinary families during the reform and opening-up period, including *Father and Son* (1986), *Er Zi Has a Little Hotel* (1987) and *Father and Son Open a Bar* (1992). While Chen Peisi played different characters, they always had the same name, Erzi, which means "second son."

After the "Eating Noodles" sketch made Chen a household name, it opened the eyes of Chinese people to the power of modern comedy.

Chen and Zhu became the main draw of the Spring Festival Gala. Watching their sketches on New Year's Eve became a collective memory for an entire generation. Yet, in 1998, the duo bowed out, performing their last sketch, *The Prince and the Postman*. They never returned to the Gala.

Rumours circulated about their

disappearance. In a 2021 interview with talk show *My Bronze Age*, Chen said that the main reason was a lack of freedom due to excessive limitations and constraints from CCTV.

It was on stage that Chen found room for creativity. Since his successful debut play *The Swindler* in 2001, the comedian has produced, directed and performed in 12 comedy stage shows. Among them, *The Stage* (2015) and *The Interrupted Dream* (2021) are the most lauded. Both concern the fate of folk opera troupes in the war-torn Republican period. Many critics and theatregoers acclaimed the two works as "the pride of Chinese comedy plays."

'Art Transcends All'

For Chen, his film *The Stage* tells a story of how "art transcends all" – a motto that features on the film poster. "Art transcends all" is a principle held among traditional Peking Opera performers, meaning no matter what happens, the show must go on, and artists should put art above all else.

Written by distinguished playwright and Chen's childhood friend Yu Yue, *The Stage* has been performed more than 330 times in 65 cities, including Vancouver and Toronto, Canada. The play scored audience ratings as high as 9/10 on China's leading review website Douban.

In the film, Hou Xiting, played by Chen, is the leader of the famous Wuqing Troupe. The group travels to Beijing to perform classic opera *Farewell, My Concubine*, where they meet General Hong, a capricious and uncultured warlord who mistakes a waiter in a steamed bun restaurant for the troupe's top star. General Hong threatens the troupe, forcing them to cast the waiter as the male lead, which leads to a series of calamities. Under huge pressure, the cast and crew are torn between their devotion to art and their fear of someone with power over them.

The conflict in the film is a common predicament that affects artists throughout history: the arbitrary interference in art by those with power. General Hong forces the troupe to change the tragic ending of the ancient classic *Farewell, My Concubine* into a tawdry, happy ending. The warlord's rude and overbearing demands give the artists no way out, making them determined to sacrifice their lives to defend the principle "art transcends all."

In an interview with the *People's Daily* in August, Chen explained his ethos. "People nowadays like to use the word 'long-termism.' In the past, older generations of artists used the expression 'art transcends all.' These two phrases deliver similar meanings. Generation after generation, artists in traditional opera troupes have stuck to this principle. They believe that a good show is a product practiced and polished for years. Artists must have such tenacity and persistence," he said.

"Always respect our audience and never fool them. No matter how trends change, artists must stick to the rules and principles of art, no matter what," Chen said.

The Stage film has earned a high rating of 8/10 on Douban. Most viewers praised the work for boldly depicting artists' persistence in defending the dignity of art in the face of a mighty power. "Political forces always change, but art remains constant. Classic art has an inner vitality that withstands time and war," commented Douban user Li Meng. "Essentially, Chen Peisi uses a story set in the Republican period to satirise common phenomena, such as laymen guiding professionals, politics overriding art and institutions suppressing individuals," another user Paradox commented.

"Either the narrative style or the comedy effects, *The Stage* is a typical 'Chen Peisi-ish work," said Huo Tang, a film critic based in Beijing. "Chen is particularly good at designing the plot around mix-ups, be it wrong locations or mistaken identities. The comedic effect comes from the dramatic irony they create – the audience knows what is happening, but the characters do not," Huo told *ChinaReport*.

In recent years, Chinese comedy films have heavily relied on jokes, wordplay and punchlines – "As if we are watching a standup comedy show or reading an audiobook of jokes" as Huo puts it. "But the thing is, audiences can easily enjoy funny skits in short videos or ultrashort dramas on Douyin. So why should they buy tickets and go to cinemas for a comedy film?" he said.

"*The Stage,* nevertheless, is a typical well-made play. The format features exquisitely designed plots, unexpected twists and tense theatrical conflicts. Creating such a well-structured, deliberately designed comedy is way harder and of higher quality than making a compilation of funny jokes," he said.

'Old School'

As many viewers commented, *The Stage* feels like an "old-style" film. Some have criticised it for being old-fashioned both in its cinematic language and in some of its values.

"Chen Peisi seems to have been away from the film industry for too long. The way they express themselves in *The Stage* is very old-school. The silver screen isn't the stage. Adapting a stage play for film requires changing dramatic techniques into cinematic language. But *The Stage* seems more like a play than a film," commented Douban user Evenc.

"This film is very 'old,' both in a good way and a bad way. It's a well-told story about old-style artists' persistence in art. That's very good. But the bad thing is that it also conveys the old artists' outdated values, especially regarding gender," commented user Ah Sen.

The film's sexualised portrayal of the sole female character, along with a few crude jokes, has drawn weighty controversy. Many viewers have criticised the film as being vulgar and misogynistic.

The female character, Siyue, or Concubine Six, is the sixth concubine

Chen Peisi performs in his self-produced and directed stage play *The Balcony*, Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, January 14, 2009 (Photo by VCG)

of General Hong. She is an enthusiastic Peking Opera fan and admires the troupe's top star, who always performs the male lead. She throws herself at the star, and even mistakes the miscast waiter for the male lead when he is in his stage make-up. Much of the comedic effect comes from a few crude jokes and sexual innuendo.

"I saw the play version of *The Stage* in May this year. The play itself was good, very deep and profound. But I found the disrespectful portrayal of a woman unpleasant. To be honest, among all the stage performances I've ever seen, this one had the most dirty jokes," said Qing Mao, a 30-year-old theatre enthusiast from Beijing who has seen nearly 200 plays.

"When I knew the play was being adapted for the screen, I expected it would cut those vulgar jokes and have a better portrayal of Concubine Six. But after I watched the film, I found it still kept all those uncomfortable dirty jokes and sexual innuendos. It was a real pity," Qing told *ChinaReport*.

Comedy Is Tragedy

"The core of comedy lies in tragedy," is Chen's principal theory of writing comedy.

Since 2012, Chen has held the Dadao Comedy Training Camp, an annual two-month programme for around 20 young comedy artists and enthusiasts. During the camp, the veteran comedian shares his decades-long experiences and thoughts about comedy acting.

"For decades, the most basic part of creating comedy for me is to manifest tragedy in a comedy. Whether it's a joke, a crosstalk punchline or a play, all comedic effects that make people laugh must have a tragic core," Chen said during a course at his first training camp in June 2012, which has been uploaded to platform NetEase Open Course.

From Huo Tang's perspective, the essence of Chen Peisi's comedy is to present life's absurdities and mix-ups, which are rooted in tragedy. "Chen's work often makes you laugh about the absurdities at first, then you start to doubt whether these absurdities are real. Eventually it makes you reflect on the reasons behind the mistakes and absurdities," Huo said.

The comedian never sees comedy as simple, light entertainment meant just to make people laugh. "A good comedy must be a meaningful story for both individuals and society. The meaning is not something forcefully imposed on the audience. Instead, it is hidden in the absurdity of the plot, within the predicaments of the characters, waiting for the audience to uncover it themselves. This is the essence of comedy in my mind," Chen told *People's Daily*.

He believes that the depth of comedy is deeply rooted in culture. "True comedic conflicts grow in the fertile soil of culture. As artists, we should respect what we are doing and respect the stage. We embrace innovation and new breakthroughs in art, but we should never forget the roots of culture. It's just like tree planting – you can trim the twigs and leaves, but if you cut the roots, the tree will die," Chen said.★

Zhu Xi

Wisdom Without Borders

His words once guided China's emperors. Today, Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucian ideas on knowledge and virtue are inspiring new perspectives worldwide on the moral order of life itself

By Du Guodong and Wang Yuyan

Pictured is the 23-metre-tall statue of Zhu Xi in Wufu, Nanping, Fujian Province
(Photo by CNS)

Eight hundred years after his death, Zhu Xi still speaks to the world. The Neo-Confucianist's ideas about virtue, knowledge and harmony helped shape the moral fabric of East Asia, and continue to offer guidance in a changing global landscape.

From October 17 to 19, scholars from more than 20 countries gathered in Nanping, Fujian Province to revisit his philosophy at The Conference on Zhu Xi's Philosophy and Dialogue of Global Civilisation. Hosted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the International Confucian Association and the Fujian Provincial Government, the event explored the modern relevance of Zhu Neo-Confucianism and its role in fostering dialogue between civilisations.

Though not the first scholar of Neo-Confucianism, which blends the Confucian ethos with concepts from Buddhism and Daoism, Zhu is considered its most influential figure.

Zhu was born in 1130 in Youxi County, Fujian Province during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), a time when the Song was rebuilding itself after the fall of its northern territories to the Jin army (leading to the Jin Dynasty, 1115-1234). Amid uncertainty and division, Zhu grew up to become one of the most influential thinkers in Chinese history, a man whose moral conviction and intellectual curiosity reshaped East Asian civilisation.

From childhood, Zhu was steeped in the Confucian classics under the guidance of his father, Zhu Song, a local official and scholar. But when Zhu Xi was 13, his father died, leaving him under the care of three of his father's scholarly friends. One of them, Liu Ziyu, treated the orphaned boy like his own son, providing both shelter and mentorship. This act of kindness deeply shaped Zhu's view that moral virtue begins in human relationships.

Zhu's brilliance was evident early on. At 17, he passed the provincial civil service exam. The next year, he earned a *jinshi*, the most prestigious rank in the imperial examinations. His first post was in Tong'an County, an important area that included Xiamen, Fujian's scenic island city.

In the government office there, he hung a plaque that read, "Care for the people as if they were wounded." For him, good governance was not about power, but compassion. During his brief tenure, he reduced taxes, repaired schools and helped villagers in need. By the time he left, people lined the roads to bid him farewell.

Although his official career seemed promising, Zhu's true calling lay elsewhere. He spent long periods away from government service, devoting himself to teaching, writing and philosophical inquiry. In 1158, he became a disciple of Li Tong, a scholar who traced his lineage to the Neo-Confucian masters Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi of the Northern Song (960-1127). Through Li, Zhu Xi inherited and later refined the Neo-Confucian tradition.

Pictured is the front gate of Kaoting Academy, Nanping, Fujian Province. Zhu Xi lectured here in his later years (Photo by Du Guodong)

Beliefs and Principles

Zhu Xi's life was far from easy. Despite his reputation, his official career was repeatedly derailed by political struggles. Yet his setbacks only strengthened his philosophical resolve.

At the heart of Zhu Xi's thought lay the concept of "principle" (*li*), the underlying rational order of the universe. He believed that everything in existence shared this universal principle, though it manifested differently in each thing. This idea of "universal principle with particular manifestations" (*li yi fen shu*) became the cornerstone of Neo-Confucian philosophy.

Equally central was his practice of self-cultivation. Zhu believed that personal moral development was the foundation for social harmony and good governance. His famous eight-step model – "investigate things, extend knowledge, make intentions sincere, rectify the mind, cultivate oneself, regulate the family, govern the state and bring peace to the world" – captured the Confucian ideal of connecting inner virtue with outward action.

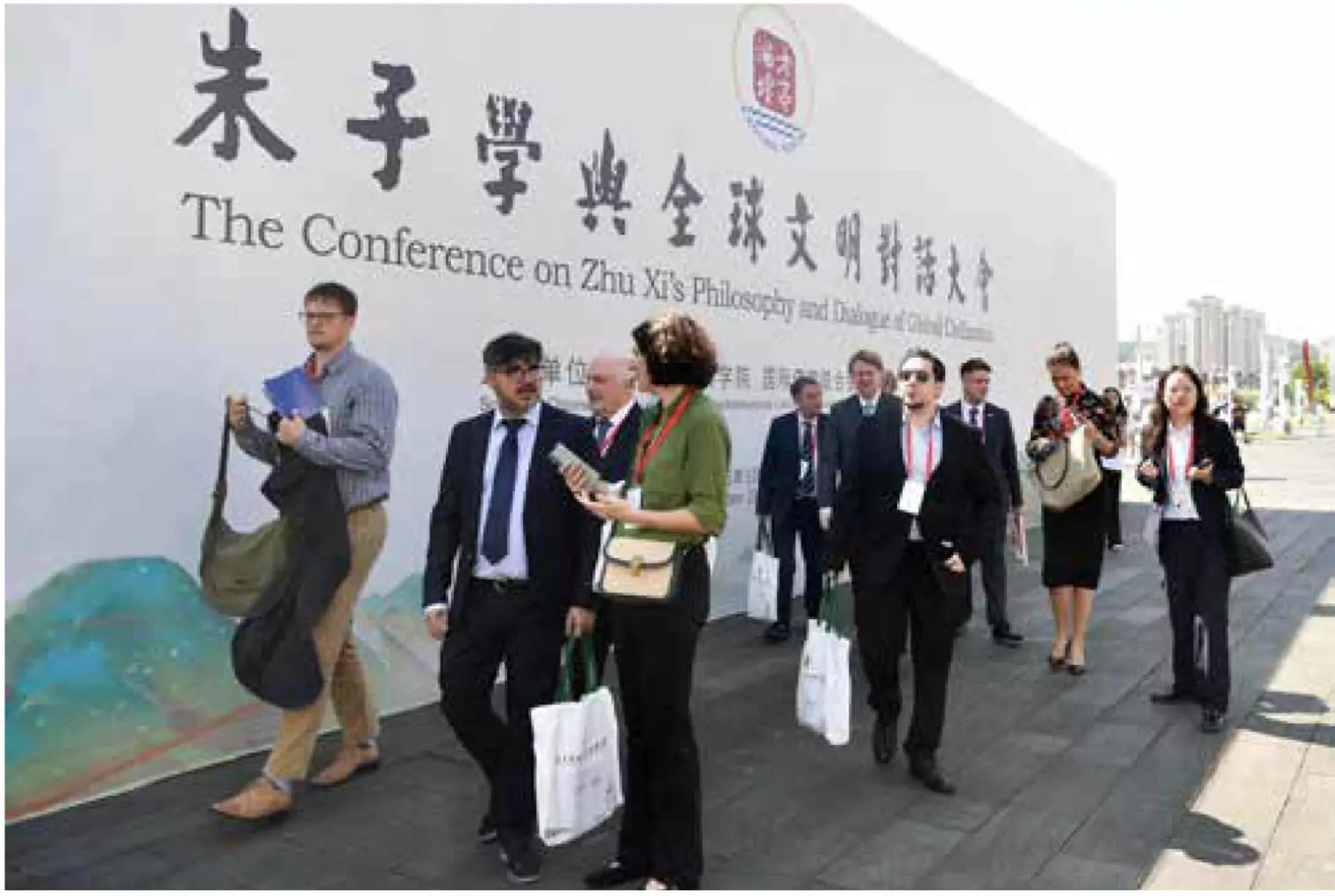
As an educator, Zhu Xi transformed the Chinese academy system. During his service in what is today's Jiangxi Province, he revived the historic White Deer Grotto Academy, one of the four great academies of China, enriching its library, recruiting teachers and writing the academy's educational rules. These guidelines, emphasizing discipline, humility and moral inquiry, became the model for private academies across China for the next seven centuries.

Later, he founded the Wuyi Jingshe Academy along the Jiuqu River in the Wuyi Mountains of northern Fujian. In his own poetic description, the academy was built "in harmony with nature, beside mountain and spring," a space where learning and contemplation merged with the beauty of the landscape.

Zhu's approach to education foreshadowed modern holistic learning. He believed that natural surroundings shaped moral character, centuries before educational reformers like American philosopher and psychologist John Dewey would make similar observations.

Zhu also dedicated decades to writing and editing. His greatest intellectual achievement, *Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*, provided detailed annotations of Neo-Confucianism's central canon: *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Analects* and *Mencius*. Drawing on more than 3,000 earlier commentaries, he synthesised them into a clear and coherent system that ordinary readers could understand.

From the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) onward, Zhu's *Commentaries* became the core texts of the imperial civil service examinations until their abolition in 1905, shaping Chinese thought, education and values for centuries. His work came to hold in China the same canonical status that the Bible did in Europe or the Quran in the Islamic world.


朱子學與全球文明對話大會
The Conference on Zhu Xi's Philosophy and Dialogue of Global Civilisation

Top: Actors in the stage drama *The Moon Over Wuyi* perform on the world's largest indoor water curtain stage, Wuyishan, Nanping, Fujian Province, October 18 (Photo by CNS)

Above: Participants attend The Conference on Zhu Xi's Philosophy and Dialogue of Global Civilisation, Nanping Grand Theatre, Nanping, Fujian Province, October 18 (Photo by CNS)

Deng Xiujun, a lecturer and associate dean at the School of International Journalism and Communication, Beijing Foreign Studies University, has long researched the global dissemination of Chinese culture. In his opinion, the internationally recognised term “East Asians” specifically refers to a group of people characterised by black hair, dark eyes, outstanding diligence and a globally acknowledged sense of teamwork.

According to Deng, the reason they are uniformly labelled as “Chinese” by “the other” is that the cultural core they share is Zhu's Neo-Confucianist views, which emphasise a strong aptitude for learning, respect for laws and order, teamwork and a high degree of obedience. “The appeal of traditional Chinese culture, particularly Confucian culture, has shaped this cultural community,” he told *ChinaReport*.

Zhou Yuanxia, an associate lecturer at the Fujian Academy of Social Sciences, said that East Asian Confucianism, represented primarily by Zhu's philosophy, is a vital element of Eastern civilisation. She added that it stands in sharp contrast to Western civilisation and embodies the principle of “unity in diversity.”

“Viewed globally, East Asian Confucianism represents a distinctive branch of world civilisation, while together with Christian and Islamic civilisations, it constitutes the shared essence of human civilisation,” she told *ChinaReport*.

Zhu's views, however, also brought him trouble. In 1194, after Emperor Ningzong ascended the throne, Zhu was appointed imperial tutor. He used the opportunity to lecture on *The Great Learning*, urging the emperor to cultivate moral virtue before exercising power. His emphasis on ethical restraint offended the court's powerful ministers, and after just 46 days, he was dismissed for being “impractically idealistic.”

Two years later, the “Qingyuan Party Purge” swept the court. Zhu and his followers were accused of spreading “false learning.” Some of his disciples were imprisoned or exiled. Zhu, stripped of office and reputation, retired to his home in Fujian, where he continued to teach until his health failed.

In the spring of 1200, nearly blind and gravely ill, he dictated revisions to his unfinished works, determined to complete his philosophical legacy. He died that year at the age of 70. Despite official prohibitions, nearly 1,000 students and admirers attended his funeral.

Global Influence

Zhu's ideas did not fade. Up through the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Zhu Neo-Confucianism remained the dominant ideology of the Chinese state. But its influence reached far beyond China's borders.

In 1195, Japanese monk Myōan Eisai, founder of the Rinzai Zen school, brought Zhu's works back to Japan. By the 13th century, Korean scholars had begun incorporating Zhu's teachings into their own Confucian institutions. In 1224, Zhu's great-grandson Zhu Qian migrated with his family to Goryeo (modern-day Korea), planting the seeds of Neo-Confucianism there.

Over the next three centuries, Zhu Xi's philosophy became the intellectual backbone of East Asia. In Korea, it evolved into Jujahak, or "the school of Master Zhu," and became the official ideology of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897). In Japan, it shaped the ethical foundations of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1868), influencing education, governance and even the moral code of the samurai. In 11th century Dai Viet (today's Vietnam), it helped structure the Confucian examination system and administrative reforms.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), Chinese emigrants took Zhu's teachings to places such as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, where his ideas merged with local traditions, influencing community ethics and education.

By the 16th century, Zhu's writings began their journey to the West. Christian missionaries, seeking to understand Chinese civilisation, translated parts of his commentaries into Latin. These translations reached Europe's intellectual circles, where Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire and Leibniz admired the moral rationality of Chinese thought.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, as Sinology grew in Europe, Zhu Neo-Confucianism was translated into French and English. By the 19th century, direct translations from Chinese allowed Western philosophers and theologians to engage more deeply with his ideas on moral self-cultivation and rational order.

Koyasu Nobukuni, a renowned historian and professor emeritus at Osaka University, noted in his monograph *East Asian Confucianism: Critique and Method* that in modern Eastern philosophy, the only philosophical system comparable to that of the West in both structure and scope is Zhu's system of thought.

Joseph Needham (1900-1995), the British biochemist and historian, described Zhu as "the greatest thinker in China" and credited his theories with influencing medieval European philosophy.

Today, Zhu's influence continues to expand in new directions. His teachings on harmony between humanity and nature have gained renewed attention amid global discussions on sustainable development. His emphasis on "investigating things to extend knowledge" (*ge wu zhi zhi*) inspires modern science and philosophy. And his vision of a "universal principle with particular manifestations" offers a framework for understanding diversity within unity, a valuable idea in an age of globalisation and intercultural exchange.

At The Conference on Zhu Xi's Philosophy and Dialogue of Global Civilisation in Fujian, scholars described Zhu's philosophy as "a bridge across time and culture." Indeed, Zhu's life exemplifies the enduring power of ideas grounded in moral integrity and intellectual curiosity.

He was a man who lived through political upheaval yet remained steadfast in his belief that knowledge must serve virtue, and virtue must serve humanity. From the quiet mountains of Wuyi to the academies of Seoul and Kyoto, and even to the lecture halls of Europe and North America, Zhu's thought has transcended geography and centuries.

His story shows that true wisdom knows no borders. B. R. Deepak, a lecturer at Jawaharlal Nehru University in India, said Zhu's philosophy is not merely a monument of Chinese intellectual history, but a living resource for humanity's collective search for wisdom in an age of uncertainty.

"His vision of principle and investigation, his stress on self-cultivation and moral governance, his sense of harmony with nature, and his practice of integrating diverse traditions – all resonate deeply with the challenges and aspirations of global civilisation today," he said during his address at the conference.

William Brown, an American lecturer at Xiamen University, has long been dedicated to studying and promoting Zhu's culture. He argues that for foreigners to truly understand Asia, they must first appreciate their historical and cultural roots.

Brown observes that many Chinese assume Zhu's philosophy can be easily accepted abroad because of its clarity and influence, but in reality, it remains largely unfamiliar to Western audiences. To bridge this gap, he suggests "connecting Chinese philosophy to what foreign audiences value – success, profit and practical outcomes."

"China's long history of peaceful and sustained development stems from its philosophical foundations, which offer lessons for the world," he told *ChinaReport*. "Westerners should recognise that true power and success need not come from force but from cultural and moral strength. Promoting Chinese culture should highlight its role in achieving social, cultural, economic and political success – while avoiding overly simplistic or self-congratulatory narratives."★

Shanghai Safety Zone

‘God’ of Refugees

A book about a forgotten French missionary who saved nearly a million lives in China and Europe during WWII honours a legacy that inspired the Geneva Convention and other refugee protections for civilians in warzones

By Xu Jing

国际难民庇护所
INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE SHELTER
国際難民保護所

A statue of Robert Jacquinot de Besange is displayed at the Shanghai Songhu Memorial Hall for the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (Photo by VCG)

At the Shanghai Songhu Memorial Hall for the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression stands a statue of Frenchman Robert Jacquinot de Besange. Creator of a refugee safety zone which later became a model for helping war-afflicted people and influenced the world, Jacquinot, who gave himself the Chinese name Rao Jiaju, remains little known in China, and is all but forgotten in France.

The Battle of Songhu (Songhu refers to Shanghai), which broke out on August 13, 1937 and ended with the fall of Shanghai three months later, was the largest and bloodiest battle during the 14-year Chinese People’s War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-1945). About one-third of the 1 million Chinese and Japanese combat forces died or were wounded in the Battle of Songhu, most of them Chinese soldiers. The battle won time for China to move economic and political resources to inland areas and forced the Japanese army to face more difficult battles along the mountainous Yangtze River instead of in the more vulnerable North China plains. China's Nationalist government also hoped that Western powers, which had concessions in Shanghai, would support China after witnessing the Chinese people's resolve and ability to stand up to the aggression. However, these hopes were shattered. A conference at the League of Nations, the predecessor to the United Nations, in Brussels in November 1937 offered no help to China.

But empathy and support came from some ordinary foreigners who lived in Shanghai at the time. As the battle continued, hundreds of thousands of civilians were left homeless and desperate for safe haven. There were no international protocols on the protection of civilians in warzones at the time. Refugees swarmed into Shanghai's foreign concessions, mainly the International Concession, which was a merger of British and US concessions, as well as the French Concession. But soon these areas could not accommodate all the refugees.

Thus Robert Jacquinot de Besange, a French Jesuit missionary who had preached and taught in Shanghai since 1913, decided to establish a safety zone.

Jacquinot was already well known for his efforts to protect civilians, especially women and children, during China's civil wars in the 1920s and the 1931 military conflict between Chinese and Japanese forces. He also served as vice-chairman of the Shanghai International Red Cross in 1937.

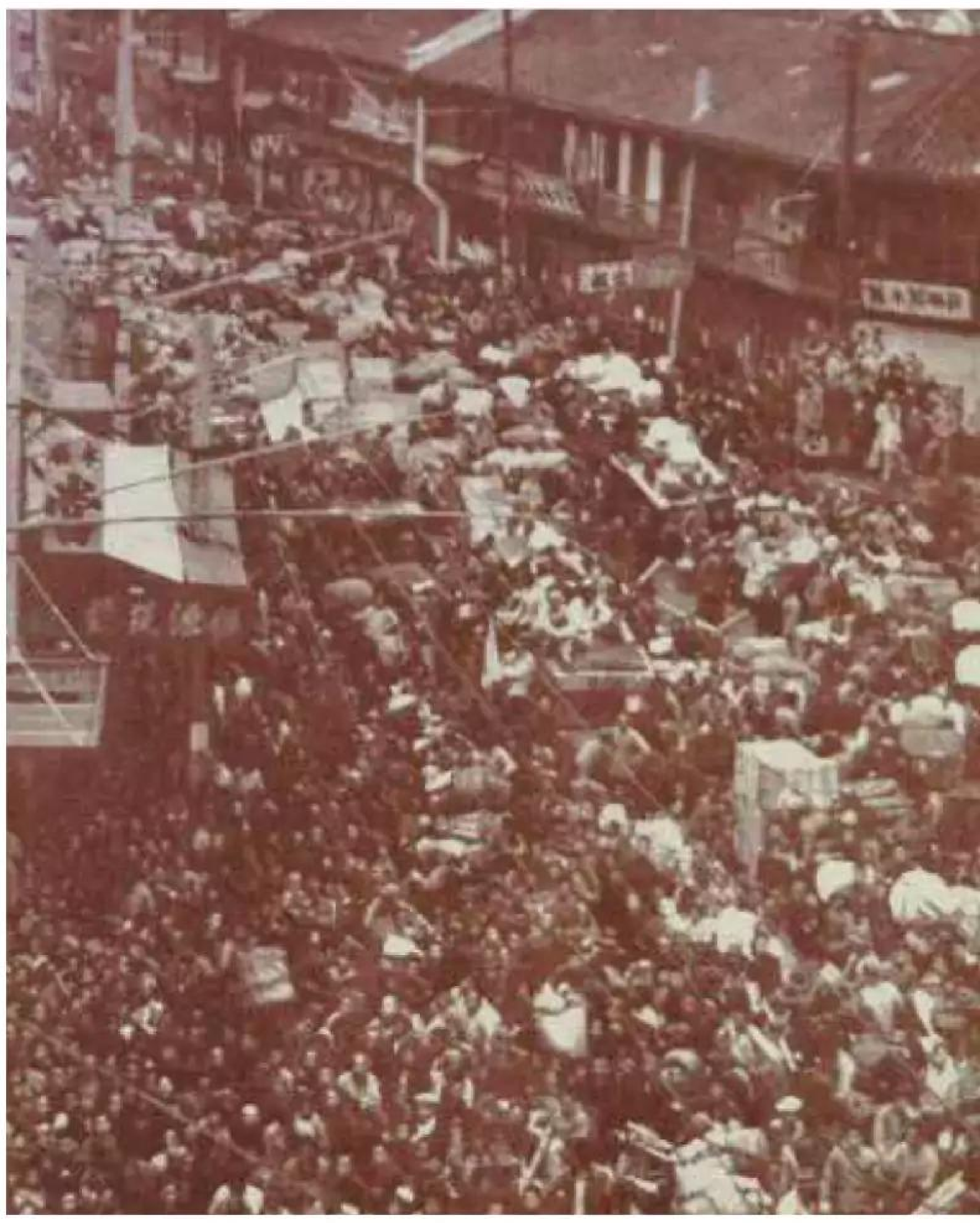
Shanghai government immediately approved his proposal to establish a safety zone. After negotiations with Japanese authorities and gaining support from foreign concessions, the zone was set up just a few days before the fall of Shanghai and was sustained until June 1940. Jacquinot initiated, administered and raised funds for the zone which was located in Nanshi District, the site of Shanghai's old city centred around the City God Temple, or Cheng Huang Temple. The funding included US$700,000 arranged by US president Franklin D. Roosevelt. Jacquinot also organised a safe zone in Wuhan, Hubei Province, in 1938 when the city was attacked by the Japanese army. His efforts saved hundreds of thousands of lives. The Chinese Nationalist government sent him a letter to thank him and awarded him a medal.

After he returned to Europe in 1940, he continued his humanitarian mission by applying his Shanghai experience to Paris and Berlin, where he helped with refugee issues at the end of World War II. He died in Berlin of leukaemia in September 1946, at the age of 68.

The successful Shanghai model inspired other similar actions and the international community. German businessman John Rabe set up a safety zone in Nanjing in late November 1937 before the Nanjing Massacre in December. On August 12, 1949, the Geneva Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War was adopted at the Diplomatic Conference of Geneva convened by the Swiss Federal Council on the basis of drafts approved by the 17th international Red Cross Conference held in Stockholm in 1948. Its Article 15 states that neutral zones should be set up in war areas to shelter "without distinction," "wounded and sick combatants or non-combatants" and "civilian persons who take no part in hostilities" or "perform no work of a military character" while in the zone. The commentary of the convention in 1958, an additional document, says that Article 15 "is the result of a certain amount of practical experience," with Jacquinot's zone in Shanghai one of the examples.

However, "while the names of [John] Rabe, [Norman] Bethune and [Oskar] Schindler are widely known in the world, even Shanghai natives have hardly heard of Rao Jiaju," said Xu Bo, chairman of Les Amis de Wu Jianmin (Friends of Wu Jianmin), an association promoting Sino-French friendship in memory of former Chinese ambassador to France Wu Jianmin, at the release of the book *Jacquinot: The Forgotten Hero* in August 2025 in Shanghai, according to news portal The Paper. Xu and Su Zhiliang, co-author of the book, called on the descendants of some of the 300,000 refugees of the Nanshi Safety Zone to share their stories with the public.

Su Zhiliang, a history lecturer at



Top: Doctors attend to refugees in the Nanshi Safety Zone (Photo Courtesy of Interviewee)

Above: Refugees crowd Minguo Road, which borders the French Concession (Photo Courtesy of Interviewee)

Shanghai Normal University, spent 20 years uncovering Jacquinot's life story. In an interview with China News Service (CNS), he shared his thoughts on how Jacquinot influenced the world, and why it is even more necessary to recount the story of this forgotten hero.

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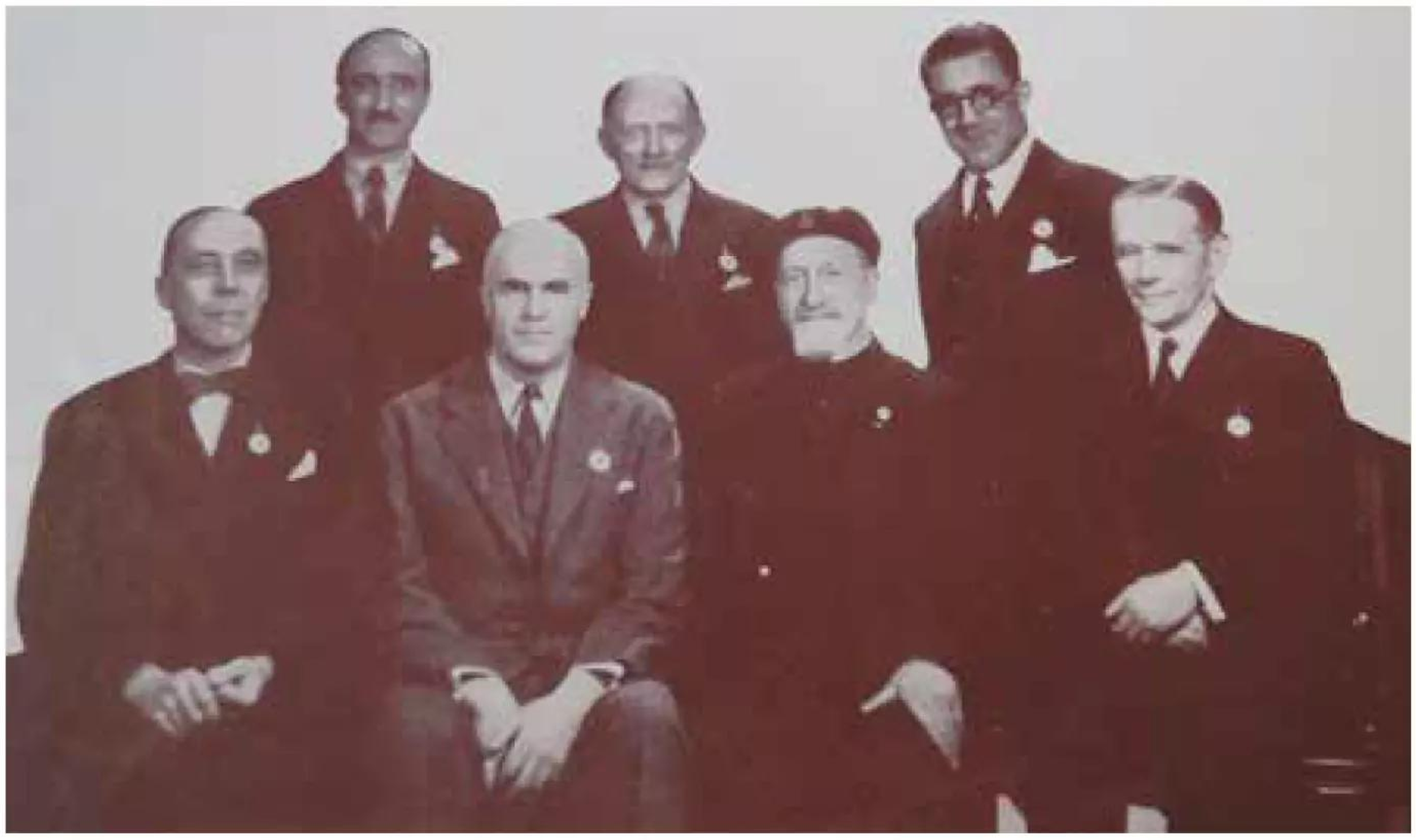

Top: Wang Xiaomei, a representative of the WWII refugees in Shanghai, shares her experiences in Nanshi Safety Zone during a seminar about Robert Jacquinot de Besange and wartime refugee protections, Shanghai, November 2014 (Photo Courtesy of Interviewee)

Above: Robert Jacquinot de Besange, (front, second from right) and other members of the Nanshi Safety Zone Supervisory Committee (Photo Courtesy of Interviewee)

China News Service: How did your research begin on Robert Jacquinot de Besange? What did he do in Shanghai?

Su Zhiliang: I read about Jacquinot around 20 years ago. This French priest came to Shanghai as a missionary in 1913. Amid fierce fighting between Chinese and Japanese forces, he persuaded both sides to set up the Nanshi Safety Zone in Shanghai's former Nanshi District between Fangbang Road and Minguo Road. On the first day it was established, he designated the City God Temple, Yu Garden and Xiaoshijie Amusement Park as well as schools and churches as shelters, which immediately accommodated over 20,000 refugees. With the later influx of refugees, the zone at its peak housed around 130 camps and over 200,000 refugees. This neutral sanctuary continued to exist until June 1940, protecting around 300,000 Chinese refugees. This Frenchman thus became known as a friend of China, and was even hailed by refugees as the "Foreign City God."

What captivates me most about Jacquinot is his compassionate dedication – a great love that transcends nationality, race and religion. With his wisdom, tenacity and skill, he made the refugee zone possible.

While the experience of German businessman John Rabe has been widely known in recent years for his international humanitarian actions during the Nanjing Massacre, Jacquinot, the Frenchman who saved countless Chinese lives before him, remains much less known, and could thus be called a "forgotten hero." We hope to reveal this part of history.

In 2013, I commissioned my graduate student Wang Hai'ou to conduct research and search for historical materials. Along with Chen Bin and other students, she was able to contact 10 refugees. Our new book, *Jacquinot: The Forgotten Hero*, was published in August 2025. Through digging into archives home and abroad, eyewitness accounts, historical documents and rare photographs, it is a comprehensive account of daily life within the refugee safety zone and Jacquinot's legendary life.

CNS: What new findings does the book reveal?

SZ: Inspired by Jacquinot's establishment of the Nanshi Safety Zone, Rabe planned to set up a similar international safety zone in Nanjing and requested assistance from this Frenchman. We also found that Jacquinot, as the head of multiple charitable organisations and chaplain to the Shanghai Volunteer Corps, was highly renowned at the time. Yet decades later, most people learned about Jacquinot from the diaries of John Rabe, which mentioned him a couple of times.

The biggest challenge in presenting Jacquinot's life anew was gathering materials and revealing historical details. Over more than 20 years of research, we gathered extensive archives, newspapers and magazines, photographs and footage from home and abroad, accumulating a wealth of primary materials.

When we set out to write this new work, we combined eyewitness accounts with historical records. We strived to display Jacquinot's humanitarianism and selfless dedication during the war, as well as his profound concern for Chinese refugees. For instance, Jacquinot said he always had sweets in his pocket. When he saw children crying, he would offer them two sweets, and comfort them by saying "don't cry" in Shanghainese. There are files showing that during the bitter winters, Jacquinot asked International Refugee Committee staff to pack hot meals in thick paper bags, wrap them in cotton wadding [used for quilts] and then packed them into wooden barrels so the refugees could eat warm food.

According to accounts by war survivors who lived in the refugee zone, Jacquinot would go to the zone every morning. People in the zone could still sleep amid the rumble of gunfire outside the zone. Food, medicine and sometimes bread was handed out regularly. There were hospitals, schools, nursing homes, factories and personnel maintaining order – almost a small society.

Our new book also reveals how Jacquinot continued his refugee relief work after returning to France, as well as his humanitarian efforts to aid the German people after WWII.

CNS: How can these efforts to recount and spread Jacquinot's story influence exchanges between China and France?

SZ: I see it as a beautiful chapter in the history of the China-French friendship, which is almost forgotten.

Shanghai once organised a delegation to visit Jacquinot's hometown, the small city of Saintes in western France, to trace his personal life. Regrettably, residents of Saintes, located hundreds of kilometres from Paris, didn't even know about Jacquinot and his great deeds.

Nevertheless, the delegation found the flat where Jacquinot was born, as well as the one he lived in after returning from China. They also found some archival materials with detailed information about Jacquinot and Shanghai's Nanshi Safety Zone, including two photographs of the refugee zone taken by Jacquinot himself.

The delegation also found Jacquinot's birth documents preserved in the city's municipal archives, including his birth certificate and family members' information. It turned out that Jacquinot's family had no descendants. That's why this name was gradually forgotten and faded into obscurity.

In fact, Jacquinot had his own unique considerations when he selected the safety zone's location. He chose an area in Nanshi which was close to the French Concession. For contingencies, Jacquinot could conveniently contact the French Concession [authorities] for assistance.

In August, I initiated a campaign with Xu Bo, chairman of the Friends of Wu Jianmin association, seeking descendants of the 300,000 refugees who sought shelter in the Nanshi Safety Zone. We hope to invite some representatives to join us at a seminar dedicated to Jacquinot scheduled for November 2025 in France. We hope Jacquinot's story can be told not only in Shanghai, but also in France and across the world, and that the descendants of the refugees he protected could become ambassadors of friendship between China and France.

CNS: How could Jacquinot's story help us better understand WWII history?

SZ: As a model of successful refugee protection during WWII, Jacquinot's extraordinary journey reveals to people today a moving facet of history, as well as the international significance of China's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression.

The story of the Nanshi Safety Zone in Shanghai is a vivid example of China and the world jointly resisting aggressors and promoting global civilisation. Today, a monument commemorating the Nanshi Safety Zone stands beside the gate of the City God Temple, and a statue of Jacquinot is on display at the Memorial Hall for Shanghai Songhu War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression.

On September 3, 2024, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres visited Shanghai, where he paid tribute to Jacquinot and the Jacquinot Safe Zone [at the City God Temple]. I look forward to the early establishment of a memorial hall for the Nanshi Safety Zone in Shanghai, and production of a film to tell this story.

CNS: What is the practical significance of remembering and retelling Jacquinot's story?

SZ: The Nanshi Safety Zone in Shanghai during WWII was regarded as an outstanding wartime refugee sanctuary. It garnered significant attention from the International Red Cross, which continuously sent people to Shanghai to learn about the zone's ideas and operational mechanisms. This "Shanghai Model" was later adopted in Nanjing, Hankou [Wuhan], Guangzhou, and even in France and Germany.

It also inspired the international humanitarian law – the 1949 Geneva Convention (IV) on Civilians, which is a comprehensive code for international humanitarian law on protecting victims of war or armed conflict. Today, these laws are widely accepted by the international community, with 196 countries having ratified the Convention. The concept of safety zones is now universally adopted, and the United Nations Security Council recommends and authorises their establishment to safeguard civilians during wartime.★

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Palace Museum

Visitors line up for an exhibition marking the Palace Museum's 100th anniversary, Beijing, September 30, 2025 (Photo by VCG)

The Crate Escape

As the Japanese army advanced on Beijing, the Palace Museum packed up its treasures for a perilous, years-long journey across southern China, ensuring the survival of a collection that now defines its centennial celebration

By Lü Weitao and Zhang Shu

On October 10, the Palace Museum in Beijing celebrated its 100th anniversary, marking a century since its transformation from a seat of imperial power into a public institution dedicated to preserving China's cultural legacy.

This centennial not only celebrates the survival of an architectural marvel but also honours the enduring spirit of the nation's artistic heritage.

However, that survival was never guaranteed. The story of how some of China's most prized relics endured is one of resilience, beginning just a few years after the museum's founding amid a full-scale invasion.

Art of War

Following the Mukden Incident – a false flag operation in 1931 that Japan used as a pretext to launch its invasion of China, the Japanese military occupied the area of Northeast China then called Manchuria.

Soon after, they set their sights on Beijing, particularly the vast collection of priceless cultural artefacts housed at the Palace Museum, a huge complex located in the heart of the city and former home to Chinese emperors known as the Forbidden City.

Having failed in an earlier attempt to loot cultural relics during the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894, they came better prepared this time. The future of China's most prominent museum and its vast collection hung in the balance.

Panic spread throughout Beijing. The city's residents were still haunted by memories of the 1860 looting and burning of Yuanmingyuan, or the Old Summer Palace, by Anglo-French Allied Forces during the Second Opium War.

A tough decision had to be made: Should the Palace Museum's collection be evacuated?

The museum's board of directors convened urgently to discuss the feasibility of such a plan, but no consensus was reached. It was Ma Heng, deputy director of the museum's antiquities section, who proposed an immediate evacuation of the collection to southern China. He emphasised that the priority was to protect the relics from falling into enemy hands, even if it meant the future return of these treasures to Beijing would be uncertain.

Ma's proposal sparked public outcry. Critics accused him of valuing objects over the well-being of people and the nation. Among the detractors were prominent figures like Hu Shi, a renowned diplomat and scholar, and Lu Xun, a prestigious writer and literary critic. In a poem, Lu Xun lamented, "The capital stands deserted, a hollow, lonely shell, while in frantic haste, the antique treasures were shipped away." Even Ma's son, Ma Yanxiang, believed the relics should be sacrificed, if necessary.

Others organised protests. Zhou Zhaoxiang, the head of the Institute of Antiquity Conservation, banded together with other commercial and civil organisations in an effort to reverse the decision. They argued that moving the relics would be too risky, and that by evacuating the collection, Beijing would be surrendering without a fight.

As expected, Japan declared its intention to seize the Palace Museum's collection, claiming that the Kuomintang government was no longer capable of safeguarding the relics. Japan also promoted the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" and enforced the inclusion of Japanese history and language in schools under its control. Culture thus became a focal point of the war.

At this critical juncture, Ma Heng consulted with the museum's president, Yi Peiji. Together, they telegraphed the Kuomintang central government, then based in Nanjing, briefing the country's leaders on the urgent situation.

While awaiting a response, Ma Heng and Yi Peiji decided to act. They instructed museum staff to begin packing each item with the utmost care, ensuring none would be left behind when the inevitable war reached Beijing.

Among these treasures are the Stone Drums of Qin. A set of 10 sculptures, they bear the earliest known Chinese stone inscriptions, carved around the Spring and Autumn (770-476 BCE) and Warring States (475-222 BCE) periods. Another is the San Family Basin (Sanshi Pan), a bronze ritual artefact dating back to the Western Zhou period (around 11th-10th century BCE). The inscription on its circular plate contains one of the earliest Chinese writing systems.

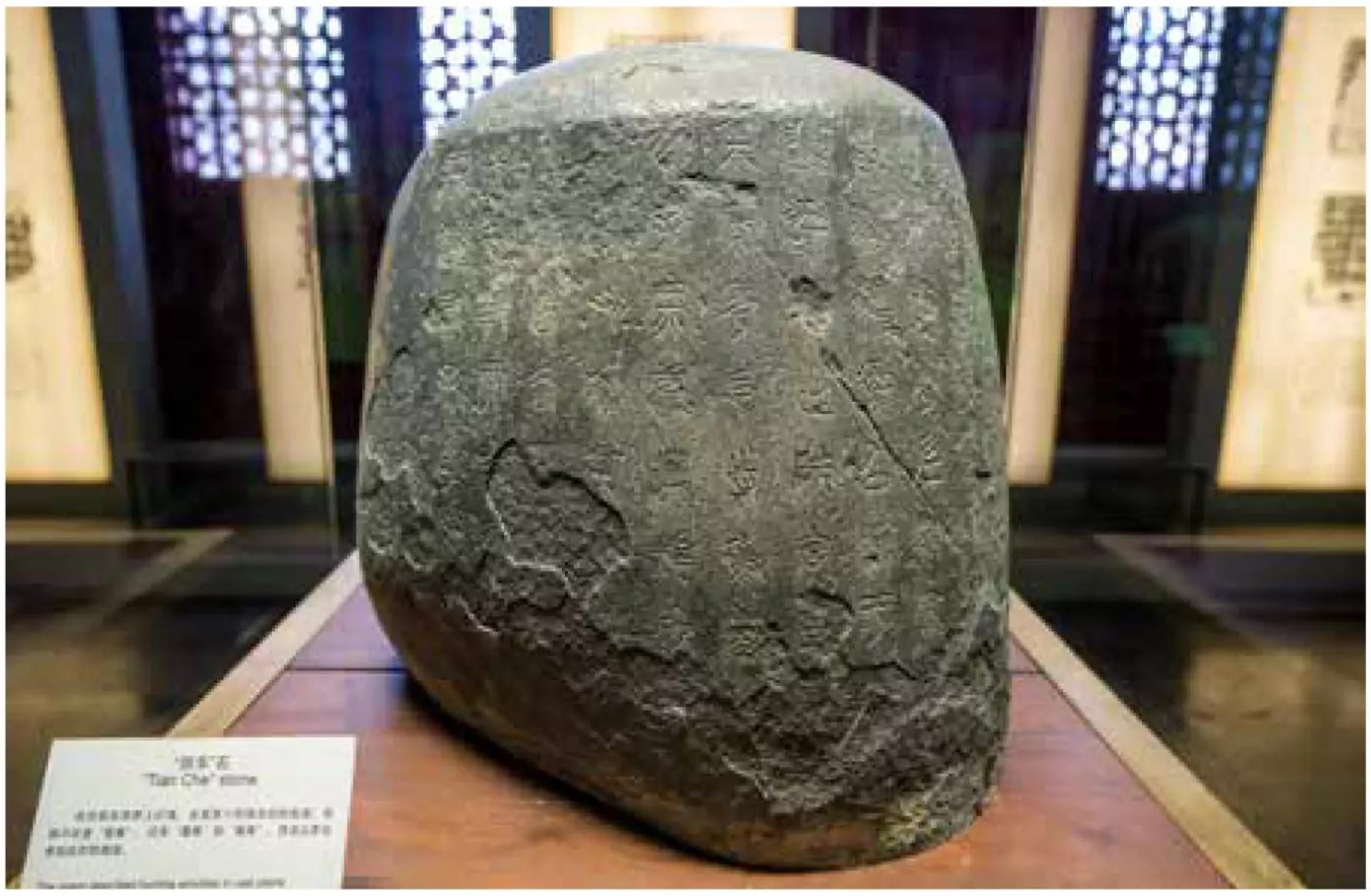
The task was not simple. The staff visited Liulichang, a cultural district in Beijing known for selling crafts, antiques and art, to learn the best methods to pack delicate artefacts.

Back at the museum, each piece was first wrapped in cotton and enveloped in oil paper. It was then placed in a thick wooden crate, filled with cotton and straw to minimise movement during transit. The crate was finally sealed with steel wire. Several trials were conducted, including dropping the crates from certain heights, to ensure they were safe from damage.

While some pieces were left behind due to their sheer size, like the 5.35-ton jade sculpture *Yu the Great Controlling the Floods* (which is still housed in the Palace Museum), ultimately a total of 13,491 crates were prepared for the largest migration of cultural relics in Chinese history.

There was no time to waste. In early 1933, as China's defences crumbled and the frontlines fell, Beijing became increasingly vulnerable. The great migration of cultural relics was about to begin.

San Family Basin (Sanshi Pan), Western Zhou (1046-771 BCE), Palace Museum (Photo by VCG)



Top: The former site of Anderson & Co, the Swedish trading house in Chongqing that sheltered nearly 4,000 crates containing cultural relics from the Palace Museum during the Japanese invasion of China. In June 2021, it was turned into a memorial hall to commemorate its role in protecting the relics (Photo by VCG)

Above: Displayed is the Tian Che stone, one of the treasured Stone Drums of Qin, Palace Museum (Photo by VCG)

Relics on the Run

It began on February 5, 1933. In five separate batches and escorted by Chinese armed forces, the 13,491 crates from the Palace Museum and another 6,000 crates from other institutions were loaded onto trains bound for Shanghai. Amid the deafening roar of explosions and the sound of fighter planes, all the cultural relics arrived in Shanghai safely.

Shortly after, Ma Heng, who assumed the presidency of the Palace Museum in 1934, and his colleagues continued their journey to Nanjing, to oversee the construction of a warehouse in the renowned Chaotian Palace, one of the best-preserved Ming-era (1368-1644) architectural complexes in southern China. In 1936, the crates were on the move again, transported to Nanjing to be stored in a newly constructed warehouse.

However, their stay in Nanjing was short-lived. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident in July 1937 near Beijing triggered full-scale war in North China. Shanghai came under heavy bombardment from Japanese invaders, and nearby Nanjing was also in grave danger.

The dedicated team tasked with protecting China's national treasures had no choice but to retreat. They split into three groups, each taking a different route westward from Nanjing.

The first group, carrying 80 crates, took the southern route, ultimately reaching Anshun in the mountainous Guizhou Province in southwestern China. The second group travelled by water along the central route with 9,369 crates, arriving in Leshan in Sichuan Province. The third group moved along the northern route with 7,286 crates, eventually reaching Emeishan, also in Sichuan Province. Along the way, local people helped as much as they could, enabling the team to complete the treacherous journey.

The first batch of 80 crates contained some of the most rare and valuable artefacts, including oracle-bone inscriptions, bronzeware, stone rubbings, calligraphy and paintings.

On the way to Anshun, the crates were temporarily stored at Yuelu Academy in Changsha, Hunan Province. However, upon arriving in Changsha, Ma Heng realised that the academy was not a safe place for the precious artefacts. He decided to carve a cave into a nearby mountain to hide the crates. Just as the cave was completed, news arrived that the Japanese forces were approaching the city. Without delay, Ma Heng and his team loaded the crates and left. Shortly after their departure, Yuelu Academy was set on fire, a narrow escape for the irreplaceable treasures.

The journey along the central route was made more bearable thanks to the help of a Swedish trading house in Chongqing, Anderson & Co, which provided shelter for nearly 4,000 crates. It is said that the company flew the Swedish flag over its warehouse to deter Japanese forces, as Sweden was a neutral country during the war. The journey resumed by water, with a fleet of 11 ships transporting the crates 645 kilometres from Chongqing to Leshan.

Upon arrival in Leshan, residents welcomed the group and offered their homes and temples to shelter the artefacts. Unfortunately, not everyone made it through the journey. While loading cargo in the early morning dim light, team member Zhu Xuekan tragically slipped and fell into the deep hull of a ship, where he died.

Along the northern route, the team faced similar hardships, especially when attempting to navigate the snow-capped Qinling Mountains. The group often had to get out of their lorries and push them manually. Adding to the misery, they suffered severe food shortages and were forced to survive on melted snow and wild plants. Despite these challenges, they reached their destination, though with fewer members than when they had set out.

Victory Day

On August 15, 1945, the long-awaited news arrived: Japan had surrendered to the Allied Powers, ending WWII. Upon hearing the news, staff who had stayed behind at the Palace Museum under Japanese occupation burst into tears of joy.

Over the past 14 years, their journey had covered approximately 10,000 kilometres, traversing at least 10 provinces across China.

On October 10, 1945, in front of the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City, the former Imperial Japanese Army in North China formally announced its unconditional surrender to Chinese military officers and Allied representatives.

On February 15, 1946, a special ceremony was held at the Palace Museum to honour the heroes who had protected and escorted the relics during their wartime migration. During the ceremony, the collection was returned to the museum. To everyone's surprise, all the artefacts remained intact, such as the Stone Drums of Qin, which are now on display in the museum's Treasure Gallery.

However, due to the political situation at the time, some cultural relics were kept in different locations. In 1947, over 5,400 crates previously held by the Institute of Antiquity Conservation were transferred to what is now Nanjing Museum.

Between 1948 and 1949, the Nationalist government shipped 2,900 crates to Taiwan after their defeat by the Communist Party of China. They are currently housed in the Taipei Palace Museum, including the ancient bronze Sanshi Pan.

Beginning in 1950, it took eight years to relocate around 6,200 crates from various institutions to the Palace Museum. An additional 2,500 crates of documents were stored in China's National Archives Administration, while 2,000 crates of cultural relics remained in Chaotian Palace.

In June 2021, the Anderson & Co building in Chongqing was transformed into a memorial hall to commemorate this epic journey and raise public awareness of the significance of cultural relics to the nation.

Established in 1891, Anderson & Co primarily dealt in imports and exports. The company expanded multiple times throughout the century, setting up eight buildings for offices and warehouses. During a 2017 visit to Chongqing, Shan Jixiang, then president of the Palace Museum, decided to establish a memorial museum at the location.

It is hard to imagine what might have happened to the Palace Museum had the evacuation not taken place. In fact, a total of 2,953 crates failed to make it onto the train.

The Japanese had melted down dozens of bronze water vats and cannons from the Palace Museum for bullet casings, while many volumes of books, imperial edicts and other printed materials were lost to the chaos of war. Among them were historical records from the Jin (907-1125) and Liao (1115-1234) dynasties.

The evacuation efforts not only preserved priceless cultural treasures for future generations but also shaped the Palace Museum into the leading institution we know today, guiding it on its journey to becoming a symbol of China's enduring cultural heritage.★

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Tourists take photos of the many lit signs outside Yanbian University, Yanbian, Jilin Province, July 14, 2024 (Photo by VCG)

Yanbian

Perfect Melting Pot

Close to North Korea and Russia, Yanbian offers a unique cultural blend and enough choices of cuisine to satisfy any gourmand, as well as stylish shopping

By Sam Duckett

Growing up in the UK, the term "cultural melting pot" was often hailed as one of the great strengths of our little island. I can't think of anything more British than enjoying a piping hot curry, watching the football and sipping an ice-cold Kronenbourg. So, when I arrived in Yanbian, an autonomous prefecture in China, I was greeted with a harmonious blend of cultures that evoked an essence I hadn't felt in quite some time.

Yanbian's biggest strength lies in its unique geographical location. It's nestled in the northeastern province of Jilin, right on the border with both Russia and North Korea. The result? Streets teeming with Russian shops, Korean restaurants and the warm hospitality that is characteristic of northeast China. This special blend of cultures is evident everywhere, from the Korean characters on shop signs to the Russian supermarkets boasting a fantastic collection of super-sweet chocolate bars and seriously strong spirits.

My flight from Beijing landed in Yanbian in the evening, and after dropping off my luggage, I was itching to get outside, soak up the local culture and enjoy a nice hot meal. However, I was now faced with the agony of choice. A cool September evening greeted me, and just a stone's throw from my hotel was a Russian restaurant offering hearty beef stroganoff, a Korean BBQ joint that smelled downright divine, and, of course, my old favourite: Chinese barbecue on skewers.

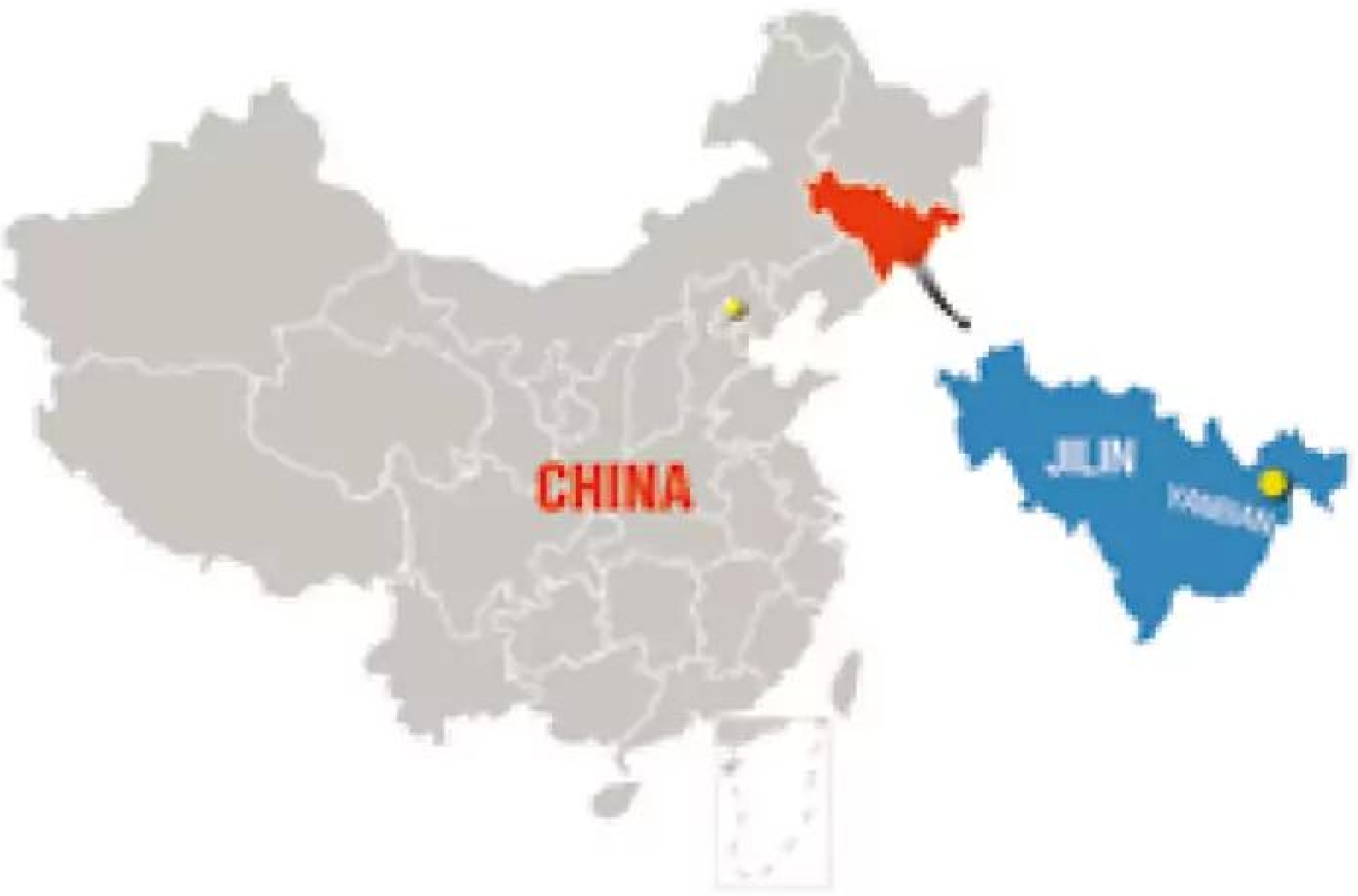
I ultimately went with the Korean BBQ, because honestly, who can resist sitting down with friends, cooking meat over a gas grill and enjoying a big bowl of rice wine? I've indulged in this delightful experience in both Seoul and Wangjing, the Korean district of Beijing, and let me tell you, this meal was on par with both. Korean food is best enjoyed among a large group of friends, and we laughed the night away over cold drinks and sizzling goodness.

Sticky Points

The next morning, my belly still full of beef, I knew I had to walk off the indulgence, so I set out for a stroll in the park. I took a pleasant walk through the Chinese Chaoxianzu (Korean) Folk-Custom Garden, an expansive space dotted with small lakes and traditional Korean architecture. Now, I'll admit that the average eye might struggle to distinguish between different types of East Asian architecture, but if you look closely, you'll spot the subtle differences between the buildings here and those found elsewhere in China. I'm used to vibrant reds and golds in traditional Chinese structures. Here, I was captivated by the softer colours, intricate wooden frameworks and gently sloping roofs.

While at the park, I decided to try my hand at a *huamigao* cooking class. For the uninitiated, *huamigao* is a traditional sticky rice cake. During the class, you mould the rice cake mixture into adorable traditional designs, including flowers and pretty little dresses. Sadly, my finished product looked more like a delicious blob than anything else. The class was conducted in an open structure overlooking a river, with the teaching staff dressed in traditional Korean clothing, giving it a delightful atmospheric vibe. For someone like myself, whose culinary skills typically don't venture far past eggs and French fries, the teachers were as patient as they were helpful.

The front gate of Yanbian University, Yanbian, Jilin Province, August 12, 2022 (Photo by VCG)



On the next day of my trip, I ventured to the social media darling, Yanbian University. If you travel down Park Road, you'll notice a famous wall of the university densely covered in signage and shops, standing several storeys high. The entire display echoes a cyberpunk theme that looks like it popped straight out of the popular video game. With plenty of hole-in-the-wall eateries and quirky shops, there's no shortage of ways to spend your time. I'd recommend visiting this particular tourist hotspot around sunset for that all-important Instagram-perfect moment. After snapping a bunch of cool pictures for my own social media profile, I swung by the main gate of the university for one final shot. The roof of the gate is shaped like a boat, and it is unlike anything I have seen at any of other Chinese universities. Totally worth a peek!

Kicking It

After the university tour, a couple of friends whisked me away to a youth football training centre in Yanbian. Let me tell you, these kids play harder than I do after a double espresso. It was truly heartwarming to see how passionately these youngsters immersed themselves in the game. It took me back to my days playing football at the local park and in school when I was just a kid. Before we knew it, we were like cheerleaders on the sideline, thoroughly engrossed in the action, until the coach told us off for interrupting their training. Nevertheless, the whole experience got me fired up, and the next time I'm in Yanbian, I'll definitely be down for an actual game.

As I wrapped up my trip, I couldn't help but notice just how stylish the young people of Yanbian are. The South Korean influence is definitely felt everywhere, and it is particularly evident in how people dressed. With high hopes of being the belle of the ball on my next night out in Beijing, I decided it was time to elevate my wardrobe. My glamorous mission took me to the Jinhuacheng Shopping Outlet, a four-story mall bursting with boutique shops stocked with trendy yet affordable apparel.

I walked into the shopping centre in the morning looking like something the cat dragged in, but I emerged later that day ready for my K-pop audition. The shopping spree alone made my trip feel like a major victory; I had been putting off buying clothes for ages, and I managed to do it without breaking the bank. After stepping out of the shopping centre, I noticed a supermarket nearby. In search of something to satisfy my sweet tooth, I thought why not grab a few treats to take back to my hotel room? As I walked around the shop, I couldn't help but appreciate how beautifully integrated Yanbian is. From delightful packs of sweet Russian chocolates to kimchi more pungent than anything you could find on this side of Seoul, the mix of items was an absolute joy to explore.

Looking back on my trip to Yanbian, I was reminded of how much I relish being in a multicultural atmosphere. There's something refreshingly new yet nostalgically familiar about Yanbian's charm. I would certainly return for a week, and I wholeheartedly recommend this Korean autonomous prefecture to anyone who has a flair for food, culture and shopping.★

Practicalities

Yanbian is connected by domestic flights to other Chinese cities, as well as international flights to South Korea, Russia and Japan.

The closest high-speed rail station is Yanji West Station, which has connections to Beijing and Changchun.

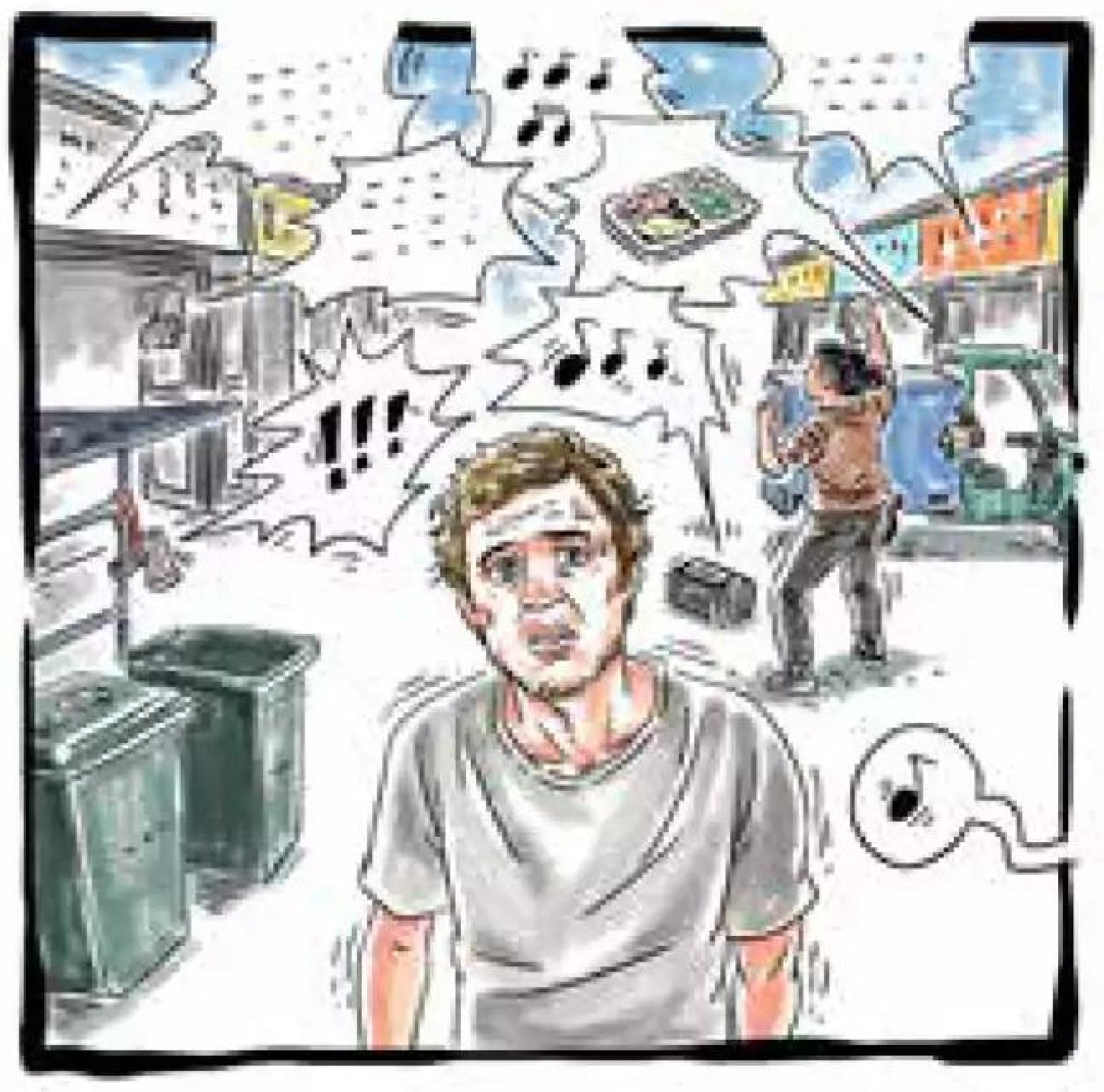
Bordering Siberia, daily average winter temperatures are below freezing, so plan clothing accordingly.

Loudspeaker Love Affair

By Michael Jones

It was shortly after dusk as I strolled along the riverbank, heading home after a busy working Saturday. The heat of the day was slowly easing, and the riverside park provided an oasis of calm, away from traffic and the bustle of people. The walk was almost meditative. Suddenly, the tranquillity was abruptly interrupted by an electrical screech. Within moments, the air filled with the semi-tuned vocals of an enthusiastic lone singer, whose energy levels obscured his older years. From his loudspeaker, vivid Cantopop beats filled the air, and my peaceful trance was shattered. Welcome to the land of the loudspeaker.

In China, there's always a soundtrack, and it is often delivered through a megaphone or speaker. There are recorded announcements calling on residents to sort their rubbish properly, exercise music for covens of retired ladies to dance to, the jingles and arrival notices of delivery drivers, school loudspeakers calling students to lunch, endlessly repeated warnings to pay attention to slippery surfaces, blaring advertisements beckoning passers-by to buy from their local shop, tourist guides wielding megaphones to lead crowds who stand only metres away, and personal speakers sharing social-media messages with everyone in earshot. In cities, these noises tend to blend in with the natural ruckus that is created when tens of millions of people share a space. However, the loudspeakers of China are not limited to the urban environment, they are ubiquitous and feature even in villages and rural life.



I remember one particular instance while walking through a rainforest park near Sanya. I arrived at the top of a staircase, having successfully traversed numerous natural obstacles without harm. At the top, someone had tied a megaphone to a post, delivering a constant stream of pre-recorded "mind the stairs" warnings at a piercing decibel level in Chinese, English and Russian. Clearly, a great deal of thought and effort had gone into ensuring that the park was safe for all potential visitors. Sadly, less thought had gone into whether those visitors might prefer serenity over paternalistic security. On another almost surreal occasion, I was hiking a mountain with a friend when we found ourselves completely alone atop a peak, staring out at some of the most phenomenal scenery on the planet. However, adjacent to the path stood a solitary loudspeaker atop a post, playing a constant orchestral rendition of "Auld Lang Syne." We were, and remain, rather baffled as to for whom the speaker was intended. We were the only ones around for quite some distance. However, my hiking partner was Scottish, so he did rather wonder if it was a tailor-made welcome for his arrival.

> Adjacent to the path stood a solitary loudspeaker atop a post, playing a constant orchestral rendition of "Auld Lang Syne." We were, and remain, rather baffled as to for whom the speaker was intended

The ubiquitous nature of loudspeakers in China is often a cause of confusion, bemusement, and even complaint for foreign residents. However, a deeper understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture can help shed light upon this dimension of Chinese life. China values the community to an extent that may be unusual in other countries. Public sounds are not an intrusion upon the individual; they are a sign of shared life. Communication is communal. From village announcements to revolutionary radio, collective sound has a long tradition in China of unifying communities and bringing people together. Today's loudspeakers are direct descendants of that tradition – tools of connection and cohesion. There is a practical dimension to the volume of China, especially within dense and busy urban environments, where volume can equate to efficiency. International visitors to China could be wise to understand the concept of *renao* – meaning lively and joyful hubbub. This idea has no exact English equivalent or translation. Indeed, it expresses something many foreigners misunderstand. What to Western ears is often considered noise, to a Chinese sensibility it is just life happening.

The noise of China reflects deeper truths about community, communication and confidence. In much of Europe, making loud noises in public is considered shameful, especially on public transport. In English there is even a famous phrase that "silence is golden." China is different, and after living here for many years I realise that the loudspeakers no longer bother me. They remind me that I am part of something bigger: a society that values shared experience, community cohesion and collective responsibility. Perhaps silence is not golden after all. Perhaps it is overrated. So instead of fighting the daily announcements about mosquito control, square-dancing music and the corner shop's invitation to buy cheap oranges, let's embrace our neighbours, embrace our community, and make some noise together! ★

Crash Course

By Joshua Dummer

Morning traffic in Beijing can feel like total chaos. I used to commute over 10 kilometres by electric scooter every day. I made short work of it though, blasting heavy metal and weaving between more risk-averse drivers. I thought I had mastered the rhythm of rush hour, trying to race the takeout guys as they whizzed off breakfast steamed buns and cups of soya milk.

But Beijing has a way of bringing you back down to earth. Or in this case, back down to the asphalt.

One warm autumn morning, idling at a red light, I cranked my wrist when the green light appeared. I made it maybe 10 metres, before I suddenly stopped making it. A tricycle-trailer reversed into the bike lane and both my scooter and the legs it was carrying ploughed into it.

The next thing I knew I was lying in the road giving the panicked tricyclist and anyone else in earshot an impromptu lesson in English profanity.

First, I insisted on getting the tricyclist's WeChat, as I was paranoid he might just drive off. His profile picture was a little girl, maybe 5 years old

The tricyclist, a young man from Henan Province who was hauling bags of cement to a construction site, grabbed me under both armpits and yanked me to my feet. Seconds later, he yanked me to my feet again as I'd returned to the road. Eventually, my scooter and I were successfully hauled to the pavement. I surveyed the damage. My scooter – cracked. My legs – rapidly swelling and indented with the outline of the tricycle's trailer.

This incident was met with the customary mix of complete indifference and excessive interest. While most commuters passed by indifferently, an elderly man in pyjamas ambled over, declaring it the tricyclist's fault.

That was a relief. I might be cynical, but my first thought was making sure that I won the argument over responsibility. First, I insisted on getting the tricyclist's WeChat, as I was paranoid he might just drive off. His profile picture was a little girl, maybe 5 years old.

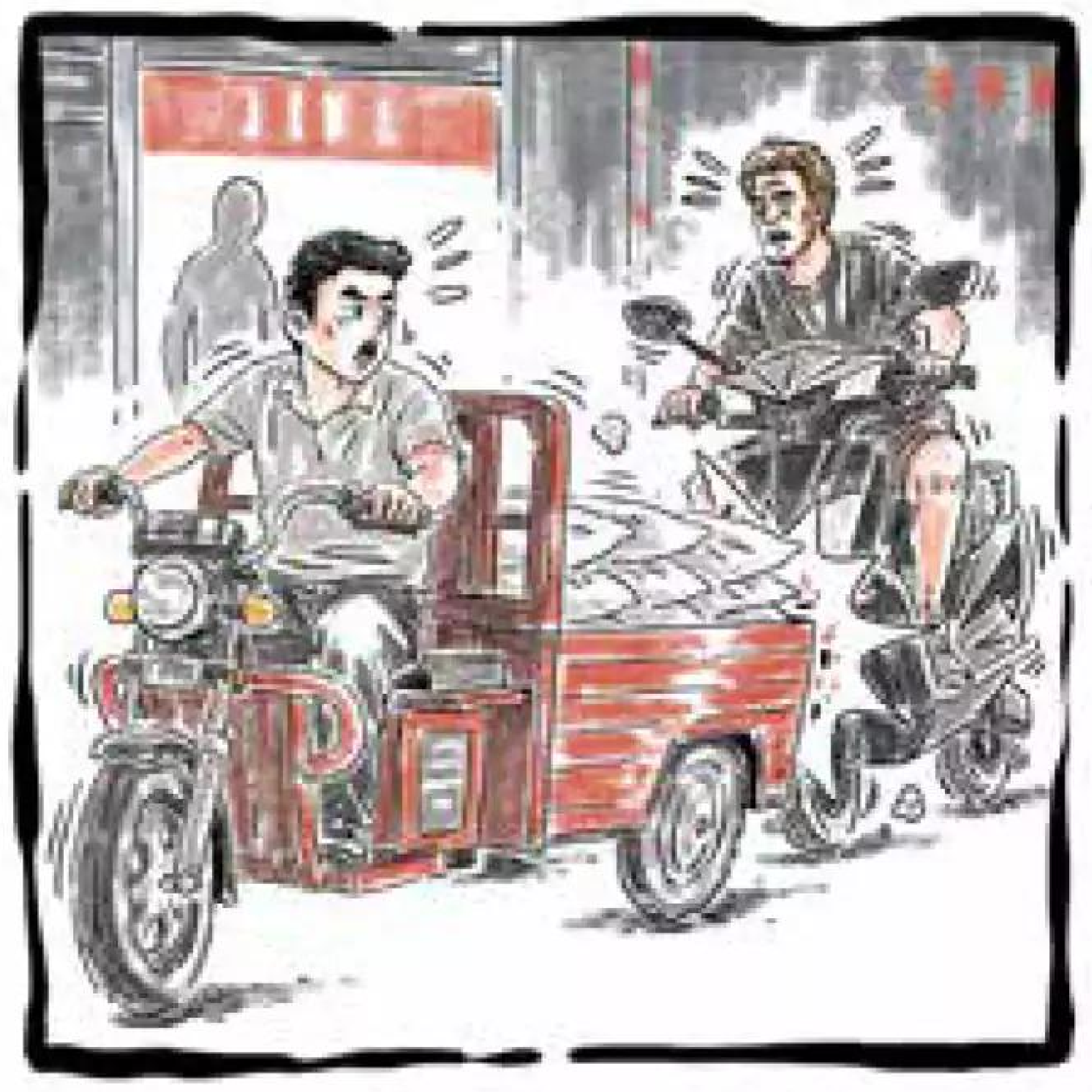
Next came our phone calls for help – I to my wife, for translation and cultural navigation, the driver to his colleague, to ensure the cement wasn't delayed.

Soon our supporters showed up. My wife went to chat with the tricyclist, who immediately admitted complete responsibility and agreed to pay for everything. Given this, involving the authorities was deemed unnecessary. This didn't go down well with tricyclist No. 2.

"Call the cops," he said. "They'll side with you. He's a foreigner." As the tricyclist waved away the suggestion, my wife pounced on it. "Sure, let's call them! There's a camera there and a camera there. Let's see what kind of deal we can make with them here!"

Chastened, he decided that the cement really should be getting to its destination about now, and left.

With matters of responsibility settled, I limped into the hospital – the crash had conveniently occurred directly outside it. The X-ray showed no fracture and the doctor recommended nothing more than an anti-inflammatory cream. Now a price



tag had been put on the damaged human, it was the bike's turn. Cosmetic repairs only.

The end was rather anticlimactic. The driver forked over about 1,000 yuan (US$142) for the X-ray, the repairs and a token compensation. With a final "very sorry," the matter was completed. We'd gone through the agreed-upon script and everyone had played their role.

Of course, it wasn't really the end. For two days, I couldn't walk. For months, a sharp pain flared up every time I bent my knee too far, which faded to a dull ache, the impact's stubborn ghost. The scar it left isn't dramatic, a red blob and a shallow dent.

Another thing that stuck with me was his WeChat photo – his little daughter. There was never any doubt about the "right" and "wrong" from a legal perspective, but I still felt uneasy. The money he handed over could have gone to her, for school, a new dress, a special treat. Instead, it went to my X-ray and a cracked scooter fender. A moment's inattention had cost him a few days' wages.

I thought I'd learned to master Beijing's rush hour. But a more profound lesson was delivered by an honest, if inattentive, tricyclist. It's not easy to admit fault and do the right thing. The scar just isn't a reminder of the crash; it's a reminder of the weight of his apology, and the discomfort of being on the receiving end of a responsibility paid in full.★

Carbo-loading on My Muslim Street Marathon

By Mina Yan

One of the most popular Chinese cities to visit is Xi'an, Northwest China's Shaanxi Province. It's known for many things, the most famous of which has to be the Terracotta Warriors. But today, we're not here to talk about how Xi'an used to be the ancient capital of China or the accomplishments of Emperor Qin Shi Huang (who reigned from 221-210 BCE) and his massive mausoleum that is still being explored.

No. Today we're talking about eats.

Xi'an is a city that's heavy in carbs and protein. Whether it's noodles, barbecue or Chinese hamburgers, this city is a foodie destination, and one of the most recommended streets to visit for any foodie is the city's Muslim Street. I was told that the Muslim Street is "just for tourists," but I went anyway, and that's not entirely true.

Stepping onto Muslim Street is more than just a culinary excursion for your taste buds – it's a full sensory attack. There are the aromas of barbecue and sounds of woks firing up, mixed with the hustle and shouts of street vendors. It's enough to overwhelm you for a few moments.

But beyond all the knickknacks and similar-looking shops, this place is a living community. The street lies in the heart of the historic Muslim Quarter, home to the city's Hui Muslim population. It offers tastes of authentic Xi'an to natives just heading around the corner to their favourite local eatery. Everybody eats here.

Navigating the countless food stalls can be delightfully overwhelming. The air is thick with the aromas of roasting meat, spices and steaming breads. But here's a tasty way to navigate them: You've got to start with a flatbread in mutton soup (*yangrou paomo*). You are served a flavourful mutton broth with flatbreads to tear into tiny pieces and sop all those flavours up. The result is a hearty, comforting dish traditionally served with sweet garlic and chilli paste.

Next, seek out the famous Chinese hamburger, the *roujiamo*. To me, it resembles more of a sloppy joe, but who's splitting hairs here? This iconic snack features a crispy, roasted flatbread stuffed with seasoned, stewed meat. For an exceptional experience, look for vendors who chop the meat fresh and add a dash of chilli pepper.

Finally, you can't leave Xi'an without having tried *biang biang* noodles. The word *biang* is literally among the most complex characters in the Chinese language. Many font sets don't even include it, which is why some stalls spell it out in Romanised pinyin.

Named after the sound the dough makes when slapped against the counter (*Biang*!), these are not your average noodles. They are hand-pulled into wide, belt-like ribbons. Their chewy, satisfying texture is perfect for its dressing of fiery chilli oil, sharp Chinese vinegar and savoury soya sauce that's typically topped with garlic chives and ground meat.

To fully embrace the experience, you've got to go on an empty stomach and a curious mind. The food is so filling that you're bound to be stuffed before you make it to the end of the street. The best times to explore are late afternoon into the evening when the area is at its most vibrant.

A journey to Xi'an's Muslim Street is a feast for all the senses. It's a place where history is not just seen, but also tasted, and it is, without a doubt, the unmissable heart of any trip to Xi'an.★

REALCHINESE

zhǔ lǐ rén

主理人

zhuliren

manager/person-in-charge/curator

The Chinese term *zhuliren*, originally meaning a manager or lead creative of a brand or product, has recently gone viral on social media, after a wave of short videos mocking service workers who insist on calling themselves *zhuliren* spread across platforms like Douyin.

In these videos, some café staff reject being called "managers" or "waiters," preferring *zhuliren* – which in this context could be translated to "beverage engineer." The phenomenon began in boutique cafés where employees used the title to signal a supposedly higher class of establishment, offering a refined environment, premium coffee, and, of course, higher prices. For them, only *zhuliren* captures the uniqueness of their role and elevates them above ordinary café workers.

However, as some *zhuliren* ignored customers who called them "manager" or "waiter," appearing arrogant and pretentious towards people they believe to be beneath them, the backlash came quickly. Parody videos soon flooded the internet.

Netizens joked that anyone could be a *zhuliren*: a street vendor selling fried chicken could be a "*zhuliren* of fried chicken," a taxi driver a "*zhuliren* of cabs," or an office worker the "*zhuliren* of his desk." One viral video even featured a primary school student declaring himself the *zhuliren* of piles of homework.

Commentators say the trend reflects an obsession with hollow titles and image-building, while overlooking what truly matters: product quality and the ability to provide genuinely satisfying service.★

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